

Holy War

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Summary: Sometimes war is a constant. You can escape from the whistle of bullets and blades glitter that tearing the space into "us" and "them", but you can't run away from yourself. And an internal war is eternal.

## 1. Prologue

You may live in your house, talk to your friends about freedom and liberty, lie in bed with beloved woman. But do this things really make you free? Striving for freedom we still can't understand that freedom is life's greatest lie, chains that stuck into your flesh furiously. Freedom of faithful is in the prayer, freedom of wind is in the skies, freedom of eagle is in the wings, freedom of prisoner is in his cage. The only difference is in the level of comfort. We may never understand that unless we will have a moment of peace, a pause during which we are able to look back at our life and see it as clear as never before. See that our longings to something bigger can be that chains that keep us from realization of what we already have and appreciating it. Real freedom for me lies in the independence from false ideologies that bind you, force you to follow the only possible way - the one that they preach.

The way of law-abiding citizen, the path of an outlaw, of an honest man, of anarchist or a moralist - this is all just a frames that limit the existence and excluding comfort and the possibility of change. Not everyone can withstand such adherence to a single road and not all are able to renounce it. And they are not the one to blame, just as we are not the one to ask them to change their way of living. Some things are just meant to stay the same and once you choose your path you can never go back and make another better and wiser choice. Trying to change it mostly means change yourself and things like that can't end good. Especially when you and your life is like /It will end bloody, the ghosts will hunting you and there will be no place in the whole universe where you would find shelter. But there are always someone who refuse to live that way, who naively

wants out and who is ready to give up everything just to try to start over again one more time from the very beginning.

For the last few years I thought that I may be one of them, beeing one hundred persent sure this life is no longer for me. I thought that as I'll come out me and Tara will try this chance together, facing the unpredictable future standing by each other. But deep inside I knew that she always was too far from this kind of life and she didn't really wanted to be in this shit any longer, though she tried to overstep herself. And just as I said, not everyone can do this and succed. br /Loosing her second time was quite easier though. From the beginning as we decided to try again I wasn't sure if she'll stand all that crap. I had no right to ask her to, but I was hoping that this time it would be different yet she run away again and in some way that didn't surprise me. She made her choice and I respect it. After all, how would I feel if being with me would lead her to more danger than it already did? That's how I soothed. I kept telling myself that this is only for the bast as well as at least she will be safe somewhere far from Charming. As long as she won't have a deal with some asshole from ATF, of course. But it wasn't my problem anymore and that's great, 'cause I will have a lot of them even without her.

Getting out of a prison after more than a year wasâ€| weird. After a long hours of rethinking, re-evaluation and making conclusions even breathing the air of old-new city was like something completely new to me. Charming seemed to be the same and absolutely different at once and that made me think about what changes SAMCRO will need to make to still fit in. One of these changes that happened in town while we were at Stockton just hit us in the face, writing some permanent problem that threatened to interfere in our way in the foreseeable future. We were quite ready for increased attention of the cops, but the warm welcome with which we encountered was very bold move, I must admit. New Sheriff showed himself as kind of a new superhero of the town whose intention was to clean Charming from any signs of a criminal gangs to which he had ranked us. It supposed to scare us or at least to impress, but we were only amused and the rest of the way to the clubhouse was full of /Maybe we were trying to hide some tension behind this humor but anyway it was about playing this game until we will sit around the table and no minute earlier. First there was meeting that we've all been waiting for so long. No doubt that saying goodbye to your family is the hardest part of going to jail, just as seeing them again is the best. This is what was constant, what can't be changed by time - one year or ten - and what's worth of waiting.

Gemma's hugs was stronger than ever, I could almost feel as my ribs started to ache.

>"I'm so glad you're home, baby," she said, holding my face in her arms. I hugged her back trying to show how much I missed her. A few seconds later I felt Abel's tiny little hands around my neck.<p>

"Hey, little monster! Gosh, just look at you! Gonna be bigger than your old man soon," Abel smiled and started immediately telling about his past year. There were so many stories to tell about and I was dying to hear them all as soon as possible though Clay as usual called everyone to chapel so we could discuss some problems on the agenda. I gave Abel back to Gemma and kissed her quickly. "See you tonight, mom," she nodded smiling.

Sitting at the table with reaper was strange, almost unbelievable but with every second I could feel myself finally at home. I wear my cut and know who I am with no doubt. Ready to swear on my old man's grave that everyone else in this room felt the same way. My brothers, my family. All the other shit outside the door was nothing right now, and even the threat of new Sheriff's big dick in our business didn't ruin our mood. Right after everyone got their part of pay jokes and laugh became only louder, the conversation went on Putlova. If that would be another me in another situation, reminder of russians would probably pissed me off but right now I was just too happy to be mad.

"And the freak circle is complete", said Juice, pulling me out of my thoughts, and here we are, laughing again, Tig and Hap louder than others - those guys are good in self-joking. And for desert Opie prepared for us one last news about his wedding with Lyla. Didn't think it will be that soon but time in prison goes differently, so there was no surprise it will happen so quickly.

"And don't you dare to present us some bullshit, I know how much in these envelopes, bros".

Soon the convocation was over and we had to ride to meet with Putlova. Saying I wasn't excited about this meeting would be an understatement, it seemed like I felt as my scars started to burn again. But I needed to be coldblooded since our plan did not include immediate revenge. Ride on a long road, which I missed almost the most of all in Stockton, was a great way to clean my head from uncontrolled thoughts that involuntarily climbed there. And even better way to do it was unexpected game that we had to play with our little a halfway to the place of meeting we saw police car that was following after us, at first silently, but as they realized that we're trying to break away, they turned on the sirens and the funniest part started. Letting them know who's really in control on the road was fucking pleasant so confusing and dividing two Sheriffs, who still haven't been able to accept the simple truth that they are messing with the wrong guys, we really caught the buzz. But everything has it's limits so we couldn't have fun this way for too long and it all ended up with another separating. Me, Opie and Clay broke away from others who were supposed to keep distracting the cops.

'Pure buisness' as a justification of all sins and the title of the meeting. I knew that the main goal was to create an illusion of the fair deal, but anger forced me to nervously clench my fists, that's why mainly clay was speaking. Personally I fueled by the desire as soon as possible to deal with it and knock out, otherwise uncontrolled emotions could spoil everything. For our luck it ended with one drinking a glass of vodka and a promise to meet at the party after Opie's wedding. The one that was coming up closer with every minute. Getting back on my bike I was unconsciously thinking about how it all came to fact that it wasn't me and Tara, but Opie and Lyla. A pornstar. I smirked to myself, going on the road and trying to throw reflections about Tara away. Sasier to say than to do, actually. But what was the point of turning back on what is now covered in past. We both need to move on and if Tara was able do that against all the promises, then I can definitely do the same. From this point I swore to myself that the new part of my life is about to begin, the part free from Tara's influence. I guess that would be

another definition of freedom for me if I succeed. But apparently some omnipotent guy above me decided that if I cannot forget Tara that easily, he will distract me with something else instead. With someone else, if being more specific.

She looked like she really had a bunch of troubles but yet she was too arrogant to ask for help. God knows how long she was going down the roadside, but one thing was clear - she won't stop, not until she get to the place of her destination. As we passed by I slowed down a little so now we were on the same distance. You don't need to be a goddamn Sherlock Holmes to understand that she was definitely running away from some kind of shit. The bruises on her pale skin were screaming about her being insulted and humiliated by someone. And since I am a sucker for a pretty face with savior syndrome (not my words, pals), I couldn't help myself but stopped and offered assistance.

"Hey, lass, what are you doing in the middle of nowhere? Need some hand?" She looked at me a little nervous at first, but then smiled politely yet a little bit sad and confused, I might say.

"Just, ehâ€| traveling, you know. New places and all that shit," she answered tired but very calm with no sign of fear. People usually don't like being stopped by bunch of bikers with reapers on their backs. This one was definitely not of the same kidney.

"We're going to Charming, it's not far from here and maybe could be new enough for you. What do you think? Can give you a ride if you want," I smiled back, hearing clay's objections already. "Come on, Clay," I said to him, preparing another helmet for our new fellow-traveler, "Don't be an ass! This is our civic duty to help those who are lost." Clay rolled his eyes, but yet didn't argue anymore. A doll nodded gratefully, taking a seat behind my back.

"I'm Jax, by the way."

"I'm Ellie."

## 2. Old friends

"Come here, you little boy!" Gemma was catching up Abel as he ran around the table outside the clubhouse. Teller jr. laughed loudly and shouted: "Won't catch me, granny!" as she stopped to recover her wind. She felt how her chest begins to burn but seeing grandson having fun was obviously more important than desire to sit down and rest. Gemma was about to continue her chase when boy stopped and turned around, but she caught some movement on the side by the corner of her eye.

>Turning, she saw a girl hastily approaching her from the gate. She needed a couple of seconds to recognize her and feel sailed irritation. Taking weakly protesting Abel in her arms, she made a small step forward, intending to send an unexpected guest away from workshop in her usual tough style. But before she could say anything, she got a demanding question:<p>

"They're out?" The girl was obviously nervous, her rapid breathing clearly hurt her to utter something more substantial. Unfortunately, this excitement did not touch Gemma at all.

"I told you not to show up here again, didn't I?" Annoyance in her voice was showed in hoarse notes. It was quite unexplainable why this girl kept coming here almost stupidly or more like having some suicidal tendencies. It was the day when ATF took the guys to jail when she first appeared, all in a brand-new business suit, with a case full of papers. At that exact moment Gemma didn't know about Jax's trick, she thought that she lost her son because of his stupid deal with that bitch Stahl, so when she saw the girl sneaking around Teller-Morrow with wide eyes and red cheeks, she was ready to kill her with her bare hands.

"Didn't you and your fucking friends damage this club enough?" Was all she said against her question. It was obvious that Gemma decided that she and ATF were connected somehow. So when the girl said that she was just looking for one of the Sons, she sent her straight to hell.

"You understood me wrong, I'm not with them. Jax can convince you, he knows me."

"Well that's bad for you because they just took him and everyone else. Now get out of here whoever you are and don't you dare to come here again or swear to God, I'll kill you."

The next morning when the truth about Jax's plan revealed, Gemma called Unser and asked him to find out who she might be. The only thing he obtained was her name and job: Thea Martinez, criminal lawyer. That was definitely not in her favor. But soon Gemma almost forgot about strange girl, because she didn't show up never again right until this moment. Considering her post, Gemma wasn't surprised not even for a bit.

"Why won't you just tell me for the God's sake if they're out?! All I need is just to speak with someone and that is goddamn important," the girl said, coming closer and looking even more nervous than a moment before. Her perseverance could be impressive, only if Gemma could deny her suspicions. After everything that happened in a last few years, her trust to strange people obviously didn't grow stronger, moreover it was hard for her to believe even some people she already knew. Like Tara, for example. Or like some Irish women. Anyway, conversation was about to continue in unpleasant way, so Gemma looked around to find Chucky. He was just going across the yard with some box with papers, so she called him and asked to look after Abel until she won't finish dealing with "some arrogant ladies". When they went away, she turned to the girl again.

"If that is so goddamn important," she raised her eyebrows, "Why won't you pass it through me, Thea Martinez?" She was trying to show this girl that she knows something, despite there wasn't much to know.

"That's personal, actually," Thea's voice sounded metal.

"What personal can be between a criminal lawyer and a biker? Come on, sweetheart, you're telling me who you are looking for again and why, or I will straighten your skinny ass out of here."

"Gosh, I've heard about the Charming charter's queen, but I never thought you will be really such aâ€œ!" Her luck she didn't have a

chance to finish her thought 'cause both women heard the sound of motorcycle engines approaching the garage.

Even before getting parked, Jax already felt that something is wrong. When Gemma was unpleasant you could always feel it barely catching her in sight. And that was it: getting off of his bike, Jax knew that some kind of new shit is about to happen. He turned around to his random companion before finding out what exactly was going on.

"Hey, can you wait here? That crazy lady over there obviously needs to be calmed down and, believe me, you're not ready to take a part in that," he smirked and shook his head a bit. "Sorry."

"That's okay," Ellie shrugged. "But you gotta be careful, the crazy ones can be dangerous."

"Oh, you have no idea," he smiled wider and then quickly walked to Gemma and her new victim for this day. "Hey, mom, what's up?" - "I can almost smell the scent of future fight", he would like to add, but wisely kept it to himself. Gemma was standing straight with crossed arms, smiling like a snake at her prey.

"This one says you know her. Sneaking around here for second time, looking for one of your brothers. Do you recognize her?"

"You know, i'm standing right in front of you so there's no fucking need to act like I can't hear you. Oh, sorry, I forgot that you don't give a shit, probably," she turned away from Gemma and looked at Jax. That is where the weird part started. Jax really had a strong feeling like he knew her, or at least like he saw her once. It was like a fading memory which he couldn't catch, no matter how hard he tried. Apparently, girl understood his confusion and said with a smile: "It's Thea, Jax. Queens, remember?"

"Jesus Christ!" he shouted cheerfully. "Martinez, you do look like a human, huh?"

"Ha-ha", she responded with a satisfied smile. 1:0, Gemma. Right away he remembered her clearly, a very punk-girl with tattoos, infinite number of piercings and a habit to curse all the time. That was Thea Martinez he knew, but this girl was like completely different person.

"What brought you here?" he asked, nodding to his mom that it's alright and she can finally stop being so protective. After his question Thea went distinctly sadder, but still tried to smile. Showing weaknesses wasn't in her style.

"I need to talk to him, Jax. And it's really goddamn important," she said, nervously tousling her hair.

"Is everything alright?" asked Jax, instantly becoming serious. The aforementioned complex of savior didn't allow him to remain indifferent.

"Relatively," Thea obviously didn't want to go into details. She glanced at Gemma who was still standing beside and definitely looked, as before, not fully convinced that the situation doesn't require her tight control.

"Calm down, mom," said Teller, almost rolling his eyes. "I got this."

"Sure, sweetheart," she made a pause, looking in the direction of the bikes. "Just like you got another whore."

He followed her gaze and realized that the picture that was revealed to her sight wasn't impressive. Ellie still was standing near his Harley and she looked even more exhausted than before, if it was possible.

"No, she's not aâ€œ I'll explain it later," he grasped that it was totally rude to offer help and leave that girl alone, so he turned to Thea quickly. "Juice is soon to come, so you can just wait for him at the clubhouse, okay? And don't worry about her," he looked at Gemma. "She won't bite."

Old lady snorted, almost playfully threatening before heading to the office, where Chucky and Abel were, "I might."

After asking Opie to walk Thea to the club, Jax hurried back to his new acquaintance, "Sorry again." He suddenly felt really uncomfortable. "So, don't you want to tell what happened for real? Your injuriesâ€œ Do I have to ask someone to look at them?"

"There is no need, truly. You already did a lot by giving me a ride, not everyone have been courteous on the road," She pursed her lips, looking down on her dusty shoes. It was clear that she wasn't one of those who imposed but everything in her was almost screaming that she's definitely far from okay.

"Right, I'm the hero of the day," Jax clicked his tongue. "But that's not all help on my to-do list today, so come on, I'll show you where you can take a shower. And, I hope, after all you will tell me a little bit more about youself. You know, as a token of gratitude." Jax smirked and took Ellie by the hand as she seemed to be okay with that. Passing by Thea, who was ordering a prospect to give her a drink, he brought her to his dorm and closed the door carefully as she came in. While she was looking around, Jax took one of his t-shirts with reaper on the chest from closet and came to her closely, never stop smiling to this new girl.

"So the shower is over there. You can take one of my shirts and change, then come out, I'll grab you a drink and we can share some stories," It was kinda funny to speak with her in such easy way, like there were no barriers or embarrassment and they just knew each other for years, meeting now after long parting. Frankly speaking, he obviously missed that feeling by the time he was in Stockton. Moreover, he was afraid that after Tara it would never be that easy with someone else, but it seemed like Ellie could be a good if not replacement, than a distraction at least. Even if only for one night. After all, life continues.

"Thanks, Jax. I'm reallyâ€œ grateful," she said smiling lightly and then disappeared in shower. God knows how will it turns, they might just vanish from each other's life this evening, next morning or continue this acquaintance, he had no idea. And, honestly, he was tired of looking that far in the future. Here, at this very moment, he just liked the sound of his name slipping from her lips and that was enough for him.

>He nodded silently and went back to the bar.<p>

Thea already started another drink, when he entered. Sitting on the opposite side of a counter, he grabbed a bottle of beer.

"Guess your mom isn't quite happy with two strange wenches. Just let something go against her plans, and here we are, ready to meet an earthquake," Thea clinked glasses with him, making another sip. "Just like my bastard daddy." Jax smiled, making another drink of beer. "She's nice by the way. That girl, I mean."

"Happy to hear you're not trying to make a compliment to my mom." They laughed and joked for a couple of times, trying to conquer hanging tension. Everything was going to that serious conversation which was hard to avoid. But before Jax decided to ask her more specifically about the reason she came, they heard voices behind the door to the clubhouse and after a couple of seconds the rest of the SAMCRO entered, laughing loudly at some joke.

"Have you seen his fucking face?..." hardly uttered Chibs, clapping Happy's shoulder. All tired and covered with dust after their little road journey, they still were in such a good mood, that at first didn't even notice Jax and Thea, yet she stood up immediately when she saw Juice. Of course, he was more recognizable than she was, but seeing him again after such a long, really long time was almost painful. Almost.

"I already began to think that you guys were really arrested. Fortunately, I'm sharing beer with a great lawyer who could help us with that," Jax saluted with his bottle. "Juicy-boy, you have a guest."

"Who, me?" Ortiz turned his head to see who was sitting with VP and froze when he finally did.

"Hi, Juice," Thea smiled a bit nervously, giving him a few moments to realize everything. If she was him in this situation, she would probably need some time to believe in his presence too.

"No way," finally said Juice. "Either it's Martinez, or my eyes are deceiving me!"

"I've told you a thousand times that you should wear glasses," her smile became wider and softer as Ortiz quickly erased the distance between them and took her in his arms. Nearly forgotten warm feeling overwhelmed Thea, encouraging her to hug him back.

"What for God's sake happened with your piercings and other punk stuff?" Was the first thing he asked when they stepped back from each other and he could see her more clearly.

"Life, I guess," she grinned. "I would tell you more if we could talk in private somewhere. Can we?..."

>"Sure! I'll show you the clubhouse at the same time and you will be convinced that we're not Tacoma, not even close!" As he friendly threw his arm over her shoulder and led her to the back rooms, they could already hear the others becoming noisy about it.<p>

"Fess up, Jackie, where did you find this pretty lass?" Chibs approached the bar.

"Wait, you haven't seen another one yet," Jax finally finished his beer with one sip. "I'd like you to look at her, she's got some bruises."

"Jesus, we've been away for few hours and he had already gathered a harem!" it was Tig. "My school!"

Catching the last words vaguely, Thea laughed too. Juice raised his eyebrows in surprise, "There is some other girl?" Martinez nodded, entering after him some room that he led her to.

"I'm not aware of the pre-story, actually. Didn't have much time to ask in case of being threatened by the Queen," her sight was saying something like 'you probably know what I'm talking about'. Yes, her sights have always been that eloquent. Juice smirked and fell on the side of his bed, hit it near himself inviting her to sit next to him.

"Oh, T, trust me, you haven't seen her in all her glory. But you may have a chance soon," it still was weird to be that close to Thea after all these years, speaking and joking like he never left her and his past life in Queens behind. To his shame he didn't contact with her more than five years or so and here she is, appeared from the corners of his oldest memories, being herself like a memory of someone he just used to know. But still he was happy to see her, realizing how much he actually missed this girl. He couldn't help himself but staring at her, trying to decide which one he liked more. This Thea Martinez totally looked like someone else and he was wondering if she changed in all ways that completely. "Gosh, i need to tell and show you so freaking much you absolutely will go crazy!" he blurted out with his usual goofy smile that Thea missed insanely. But this time she didn't smile back and Juice became anxious immediately. "T?" She sat down next to Juice, but didn't look at him.

"I'm afraid you might won't like to speak with me after what I've done," her voice was unsteady. She started to play with her rings trying to calm herself. "I fucked up, Juan, like, gravely, and this may probably affect on you too and I'm so sorry. You wanted this life so badly and I've just ruined everything in a momentâ€ Jesus!" She couldn't control herself anymore and started to cry, quickly closing her face with hands. At first everything she said made no sense, after agonizingly long moments of trying to understand, he started to realize what was Thea talking about. He thought that it would scare him, or at least made him more concerned about his future destiny considering what was this about, but surprisingly all he felt now was just unrest because of Thea and how all of this shit is relate to her. "I've done my best trying to run away from them and destroy everything that might lead them to Charming, but Meredith, goddamn, she just sent that papers with my signature and now they definetely know where I am and soon they will know about you too. Fuck, I hate myself for that, Juan. I put you in danger with me, I'm so sorry" it wasn't that reunion with his old bestie which he imagined, but he got used to the fact that life don't give a shit about his wishes. About anyone's wishes, as well. He shook his head and then took her hands off, making Thea look at him.

"Hey, Martinez. We're a team, remember? Nothing bad will happen to none of us, I promise. You have no idea what shit I had to deal with

here in last years! We'll figure that out just like we always did, yeah? C'mon, babe, stop crying. Do you really want them to see you that way?" he said with gentle smile and hugged her tightly.

As Ellie went out of Jax's dorm, she could hear a quiet sobbing behind one of the doors, wondering if that was the girl she saw before. When she appeared at the bar, it was already full of people. She felt a light panic, which in good faith she tried to strangle, looking for Jax. Finding him at the bar, she went on almost padded feet, lightly touching his shoulder so that he could notice her.

"Oh, here you are. Reaper suits you, I must say" he smirked. "Wanna beer? Smoke?" she sat next to him.

"Smoke would be good," she replied a little uncertainly.

"I assume this is another lass you've told us about, aye, Jackie-boy?" said the man with the scars along his cheeks and wild scottish accent. Ellie raised her eyebrows while taking a cigarette from Jax.

"Ellie, this is Chibs," he said, lighting a cigarette. She nodded, for some reason immediately feeling sympathy for him.

"I like your accent," she smiled. "My mom was Scottish, good to hear it again."

"Then your mother must've been an amazing woman," Chibs grinned and then clapped his pockets as if he was looking for something in them. "So, Jax wanted me to look at you. Not a doctor, but I know something about bruises, huh. What happened to you, lass?"

"I've asked her twice, but she is too polite to answer straight," Teller was almost rolling his eyes. Good-natured, of course.

"Is she?" old biker finally found what he was looking for. He put the glasses on, making a step towards Ellie.

"There is not much to tell, actually. I justâ€œ" She broke off. It was easy to notice that cigarette was shaking in her fingers. After a highly tense pause she continued quickly, as if she wasn't sure if she'll be able to speak to the end, "My father lost me in a card game."

The silence that reigned between the three of them was practically pressing on the eardrums. Finally, Jakcson decided to ask again in case he misread it, "What do you mean?..."

"I mean exactly what I said, unfortunately," she smiled sadly. "My dad is a finished gambler. He owed a fortune to, I guess, everyone in Elk Grove and beyond. Being a bankrupt, he didn't come up with anything better than to bet me in a game against the localâ€œ boss."

"Strong family ties, huh?" Even Chibs looked a bit shocked, though it was hard to discourage him.

"Yeah, stronger than steel."

"But how you ended up on a road?" Jax seemed to become a bit concerned now. It wasn't actually too hard to understand that Ellie survived some real shit, but somehow it all didn't seem to be so crappy before she said it. He felt sorry for this girl, although she, probably, didn't need pity.

"The winner no longer needed his prize," she replied with a shrug. "So when I'm saying that you were very nice when you offered me a ride, I mean it. When you are stranded on the side of the road, you don't hope much for someone's help."

"Jesus, lass," Telford adjusted glasses on his nose. "Now I'm sure that I should examine you. No arguing, come on."

Put out the cigarette, Ellie obediently stood up. Jax frowned, watching as she go with Chibs. It was one of those moments when you realize that outside your door there are a lot worse things and men than you thought. For the past few years Jax thought about the way he lives more often. It was a mess, though for the better or worse he didn't know any other life. It was who he was: guns, fights, blood, danger, losses and other shit. He got used to that. And then there was Tara, who decided to remind him about how actually bad this way of living is. He listened to her, tried to change himself without realizing that attempts to cut himself off of the club will only make these ties stronger. He didn't need changes, he just needed someone behind his back, someone who will accept him for who he is. But Ellie's story practically cut the ground from under his feet. In one moment he realized one simple truth: he might be a criminal, an outlaw, he might be even a killer, but he had never done anything that terrible. Those who suffered from his hand always deserved that and that was like his personal code of honor. He just couldn't and didn't want to imagine that he's selling his own son, whatever the reason. There cannot be any  
>justification for such an immorality. Thanks God Piney distracted him from that thoughts with another club shit.<p>

Meanwhile, Chibs carefully treated Ellie's bruises, asking about her mom with true scottish interest. He didn't ask anything else about her other past 'cause he understood that she, probably, didn't want to go back to that shit again.

"May I ask you something?.." Chibs smiled and answered immediately as he knew what this question would be very well.

"These scars are from one Irish bastard, but don't worry, doll, I've returned that little debt," he smirked as Ellie nodded smiling. "Aye, lass, I've done here. Fortunately, nothing dangerous, so now you will heal quickly," said Chibs, taking off his glasses. Then he took a cigarette and began to search for lighter, cursing about this piece of shit he couldn't find. "Anyway, Ellie, go back to Jax before he began to worry," she raised her eyebrows and grinned.

"Thanks, scotty."

"Anytime, darlin." She walked out of the dorm and got back to the bar. Right after Juice and his girl, who she saw before, came too.

"I just don't get it! Okay, VP got the girl, this is not a surprise. But you, Juice, how the hell did you got the girl? Where's the

justice in this world?" yelled man with fleecy hair as he noticed Thea. Juice blushed and offered him to fuck himself. Everyone started to laugh.

"Don't worry, Juicy-boy, he just missed pussys in that prison," said Chibs, who had also got back soon after guys.

"Yo, Fil, bring us beer!" shouted Jax, pulling Ellie closer to him. She pursed her lips, but didn't resist. "Hey, Op, how about we invite these two lovely ladies to your wedding?"

"Why not?" friendly said tall man near Jax. Juice smiled and said something to his girl quietly, but Ellie immediately refused:

"Don't think this is a good idea. You guys already done enought for me, that would be out of place".

"Nah, bullshit. Like you've got more important things to do," said Jax and the expression of his face like he won't give her any chance to refuse.

"I can't go at someone's wedding looking this way, you know", she tried to grab the last straw. Thea made another sip of beer and came closer with Juice by her hand.

"Guess, I can help you with that. We seem to be about the same height, so I can just take you with me and we'll pick you something," she smiled friendly. After couple of seconds Ellie surrendered and said yes. Soon Thea looked at her watch and said that she has to go. She quickly took one napkin and wrote her adress on it and then gave it to Juice.

"Catch me up tonight, Ortiz. And, you know, just come anytime," she hugged him tight and kissed his cheek, making Tig howl again.

"I hate both of ya," he said, when girls left.

### 3. The wedding

On the way from the club to Thea's house they were silent most of the time. Ellie was genuinely interested about Charming and Martinez decided to let her enjoy the ride, which was actually not so long as she supposed. But even that little time was enough for Ellie to realize that she's starting to fall for this quiet city. Gradually, but still.

>The house was quite small, but light, cosy and totally perfect for someone who lives alone and put his work in the first place. There were only few photos on the wall and on some of them Ellie recognized Juice from the club. And absolutely didn't recognize Thea herself.<p>

"You used to be a wild child, huh?" she smiled as Thea came back from her bedroom with big suitcase. Thea smirked and drew nearer to Ellie.

"Oh, you can only imagine. Back then I was still holding on my family ties. Being a daughter of the club member isâ€|" She shook her head, smiling a bit sadly to herself, "Well, it left some marks. But I moved on and, unfortunately for myself, sometimes I really miss those

times. Anyway, lets pick you something for the biker's wedding, it's going to be pretty unconventional," she smiled, quickly turning away from photos. Ellie walked after her and sat on the corner of the couch.

"But you decided to turn back home after all? I mean, some ties are still holding you?" Thea looked at her from behind of her suitcase.

"Not exactly. My father is a member of this club, but from another charter. There are some in different cities, mine is from Tacoma. And I better die than go back there ever again."

"Family issues?"

"Long story short? Father-jerk instead of a thousand words", Ellie grinned bitterly:

"I know that feeling."

"Okay, lets forget about those bastards who call themselves our fathers and try on this one," She smiled archly and offered Ellie a small black leather dress. Ellie raised her eyebrows, but Thea just shrugged her shoulders. "VP will definetely appreciate it," she said and laughed, while Ellie took a thing out of her hands.

"You know him, right? Jax, I mean," for some reason her voice sounded a bit weird. She was looking at the dress in her hands, avoiding crossing eyes with Thea.

"Partially. I'd better say I knew him before, but he didn't seem to change much," She shurred again. "So yes, I do know him. Why?"

"It's justâ€œ! He really seems to be one of the good guys, but I'm not sure if I can judge correctly. All the good guys I've met ended up being finished assholes," she chuckled, finally looking up.

Thea tried to smile reassuringly, "No, you should't worry about it. These bikers, they only seem to be scary and rude, so that's why most people don't like them much. But I must say that some man with a reaper on his back might be more high-minded, for real, than stereotypes make us think."

"Reaper and bikes have nothing to do with what I'm trying to say. All this bikers stuff do not scare me, actually, I'm aware that first impression might be false. I was talking about moreâ€œ! You know, nevermind," Ellie smiled a little stiffly. "I better will try this dress on, before you changed your mind and decided that you don't want to share clothes with some stranger."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, absolutely."

As she disappeared in the room that Thea showed her as the one where she can change, Martinez sighed wearily and sat down on a coach. Finally, she had an opportunity to realize completely that now there was a chance that everything is going be okay. She wanted to believe Juice when he said that they'll figure out what to do, and both of them will be safe. Subconsciously she changed "them" on "him",

because more than she cared about her own exposure, she worried that she might brought him troubles. Of course, his mistake in Queens was already in the past, a lot of time passed since than, but who knows how vindictive they were? "Shit," she thought. "Shit, shit, shit."

"I look like Frankenstein's bride," Ellie pulled her out of her gloomy thoughts. She stood in a doorway and shifted from one leg to another. "With all these bruises, only seams lacking. I should wear more something like a cerement."

"Drop it!" Thea's eyes popped out. She stood up and shook her head. "Nope, definetely not this one. Guess it's a little bit too short for someone who's not a crow eater," she smiled and immediately started to burrowing into suitcase. "Aha! Try this one, sweetie, oh, and, ah, this one too. They should be good together," she smiled and gave her another dress with leather jacket to boot. "It will hide everything. But you know, there's no need to be ashamed of your bruises. Let them make you stronger, not weaker." Ellie answered nothing and slipped away to the room with a shadow of a smile.

She felt like she needed to share her problems and dreadful experience. She was looking for someone to talk about all this crap for a very long time, 'cause keep it all inside became harder with every other day. Memories, unspoken words and horrible truth were boiling inside of her like a hellfire. There was no doubt that if she won't find somebody to open her heart to, sooner or later her nightmares will hunt her down.

There, in the club, was her first real revelation, and for the first time Ellie was almost proud of herself. She thought it will be more difficult, more like impossible, and yet she was deadly calmed when she was talking about her shitty father. It appeared to be easier to tell it to someone she barely knew. If only the other side of truth was that easy to tell too. The other one was burning inside, the other one made her shiver a bit every time Jax touched her. But who would care about some strange girl and her anticipations and hopes. She was exhausted, but somehow, appearance of SAMCRO guys in a very strange moment of her life was like a fucking gift, so she won't miss it.

Ellie put on Thea's dress and jacket, and must admit that this time she really enjoyed her look. When she walked out of the room, Thea was looking over some stuff. As she turned her head to the sound of the opening door, happy smile arised on her face. "Wow. You look gorgeous," she said, and Ellie smiled back a bit shyly.

"I guess, this one is really better."

"No doubts! So, you are equipped now. Ready to blow everyone's mind?" Thea deffinitely tried to cheer her up as she saw that Ellie wasn't very enthusiastic.

"Not quite sure if I want to, but why not," she glanced at her reflection in the mirror on a wardrobe once more. "At least, I don't look like a homeless beggar anymore. Thank you."

"Anytime," Thea waved her hand like it was nothing and then smirked, "I'm sure we'll figure out how you will pay me back."

"Oh, of course, Iâ€|"

"Kidding! Gosh, sweetheart, you really should relax a bit," she patted Ellie's shoulder. "However, I am terribly sorry, but I have some work to do before wedding, so, umâ€| I'll call a taxi to get you to Teller-Morrow, okay?"

"It's not too far from here, isn't it? I mean, I could get there by myself. Clean my head on the way back," she looked like she liked this idea for real. Thea hesitated for a few seconds, before specify:

"Are you sure? Not afraid to get lost?"

"I'm already lost in some way," Ellie chuckled. "But, yes, I'm sure. Just tell me how to get there and I'll deal in the process."

"Yeahâ€|" Martinez still was a bit unsure, but she decided not to argue.

After she sowed Ellie her way from the porch, she was about to go back inside to the house, but she noticed an unfamilliar car down on the road. It's black tinted windows for some reason didn't inspire confid ence and she felt restless shivers between shoulder blades. Back at the house, she turned the lock on an extra turn, as If it could help her if that car was exactly what she thought it was.

In the mean time, Ellie couldn't help herself, but on her way down on the road she missed a needed turn. She didn't even notice that, being absolutely captivated with this city. It lived up to its name though. Small dusty narrow streets, little shops with old signboards. In some way it reminded her about western movies, only the cowboys here didn't wear hats, they wore leather biker jackets.

She was considering Thea's words about Jax and other Sons, wondering if she should get involved in this, or the right thing would be to end it all as soon as possible. Sometimes she thought she was cursed or something, 'cause, you know, you gonna start to think about such things after another hundredth failure. And failures in her life were marked by painfully and bloody endings from time to time. Like with her dad. Or with that jackass, who he practically sold her to. Or even with her abusive ex. It felt like Ellie was just luring assholes and offering them to enjoy their stay in her life.

But Jaxâ€| Jesus, she didn't want him to become one of her shitty memories, she wanted him to break this line of permanent unluck, though she didn't decide for herself yet, if there could even be the chance for him to do that. But she needed someone near her now so badly. She needed approval, comfort, understanding. But she wasn't about to hurry, at least not so soon; she was just tired of scalding herself with delusive hopes.

While Ellie was enjoying her ramble down the city roads without giving a shit about time, Thea was getting more nervous with every single second. She couldn't focus on her work, constantly returning to the car with tinted windows in her thoughts. She wanted to believe that it was just a car of one of her neighbours, but somehow she knew it's a silly attempt to calm herself. Soon she picked up her phone and dialed the garage, which number was written down on one of

stickers on the desktop. After she asked to call Juice to the phone, a few seconds of waiting were filled with nervous fingers tapping on the table.

"Yeah?" finally, she heard Ortiz's voice on the other side.

"Hi, it's T," She suddenly realized, that all the words that she had prepared were lost. "I just, uhâ€œ I wanted to warn you that you'll might need to pick me up from work," Thea wearily rubbed her nose, trying to sound unruffled. "I'm not sure if I'll finish everything at the time."

"No problem!" Juice made a short pause. "Is everything okay?"

"Totally!"

"Okay, then tell me where, and I'll come after youâ€œ"

After he wrote down an address and they've agreed about everything, Juice hurried to return to the club, where only Chibs, Tig and VP has left.

"What's up?" Jax was adjusting his collar, looking at reflection in the glass behind the bar.

"It was T, nothing important," Ortiz shrugged. "Anyway, I got the truck, so everything seems to be ready. Right?"

"Yes, Clay said that Putlova confirmed his presence. They'll be there and when it gets dark we go to chek the guns," Trager seemed to become a bit more serious as the wedding approached. But the impression was ruined when he continued, "And that's okay that I'm one of those who's responsible for this part, cause I will not be distrusted by pussies."

"You are always distracted by them, bro," Chibs smirked.

"This evening nothing will distract us," Teller turned around with a shadow of a smile. "Cause we got some shit to do."

"Yeah, right. Besides, you have lost your pussy somewhere," Tig clicked his tongue.

Juice caught himself, "Thea told me that Ellie's on her way."

"Alone?" asked Jax with a cigarette in his teeth as he tried to light it up. Understandably, he felt some kind of responsible for this girl.

"Aha, she said that she decided to walk alone by herself," for some reason, Ortiz felt a bit guilty. "Thea's house is not far from here."

"Okay," finally, breathing out a cloud of smoke, replied Jackson. "I'll ask Fil to wait for her. Come on, guys, let's celebrate Opie's official connection with the porn star."

As they went out of the club, he called Fil, who was hanging around

the garage, and told him to wait for the girl he might saw earlier.

"When she'll be here, you both ride to the reservation, got it?"

"Sure, boss," immedately replied prospect.

"And, for God's sake, stop calling me that," despite actual discontent, Jax smiled.

Then he hurried to join the others on their bikes. He wasn't nervous about the upcoming case, but his scars started to burn insanely every time he was just simply thinking about Putlova and all that shit that he and his little Russian puppets brought him back in jail. The dirty walls of prison's infirmary, mixed smell of painkillers and his own blood were still awaiting for him from night to night, bringing another painful terror, full of the white knuckles and silent screams. So now he was just wondering if it's gonna stop with death of that bloody bastard. He never appreciated killings much, even if they were needed, but this one he enjoyed beforehand with terrible maniacal calmness.

As they arrived to the reservation, Jax gathered everyone and instructed them one last time.

"Everything shoud be done after the main part, closer to midnight. And remember, guys, this shit should not affect on Op and Lyla."

"Of course, brother. These dicks will not ruin anything, don't worry," said Bobby and patted his shoulder. Then everyone left their bikes and walked to help with last preparations. It wasn't surprise that Jax worried about this day like it was his own wedding. Make it perfect and special for his best friend was his primary task.

At the same time Juice was waiting for Thea, resting on his bike. It was still weird, because he wasn't sure about how he should act with her, with this whole new person, who's now by logic is standing right on the opposite side of the law. But was her job and way of living the main problem? He doubt that even himself. He couldn't understand what's going on inside his head and he hated that feeling. Things needed to be cleared as soon as possible, he decided. Then suddenly Thea appeared in front of him, hugging him tight and smiling softly.

"Sorry about this, didn't thought there will be so much paperwork," she said, taking a protective helmet from his hand and sitting behind him.

"You sure you're okay, T? I mean, everything's fine?" he asked, turning his head.

"Yeah, Juicy, just a little bit tired. Let's go," she answered and embraced her hands tighter around his torso. He nodded and started the engine.

While everyone started to gather at the reservation, Ellie just realized that she definitely missed some turn, or something, because she went farther and farther and haven't seen any sight of familliar places she might've seen on her way to Thea's house. After all, she

decided to overstep herself and ask a passer-by.

"Uhm, excuse me?" She made a step towards some woman with a pocket of products. "Can you help me? I need to get to the car workshopâ€|" She realized that she couldn't remember the name, so she tried to explain in other way, "Like, the one with the motorcycle club next to it?.."

"Teller-Morrow?" the woman obviously was not excited, but after a second of reflections, she replied with a sigh, "You've missed the turn on a crossroads."

In ten minutes Ellie was already on her right way to the garage, silently cursing herself for carelessness. Moreover, she felt irritation for the fact that Thea warned her, but she just waved it. Finally, she saw the signboard on the other side of a street and hurried to cross the road.

"Here you are!" It was the prospect she remembered from the clubhouse. "Jax told me to wait for you, they've already left for the wedding."

"Sorry, I got lost a bit," she shrugged sheepishly.

"That's okay, we just need to hurry now. Hope, Jax won't knock my block off."

Unfortunately, when they finally got to the place of destination, Jax seemed to be close to that. Only his object wasn't Fil.

"How could you let her go alone? She doesn't know the city!" they heard Teller's voice even before they saw him, standing with Thea and Juice next to the rows of chairs.

"It wasn't that far, manâ€|" Ortiz definitely tried to protect his friend, but then Fil hurried to interrupt them:

"Jax, I brought her!"

"Ellie!" It was Thea, who actually felt a little guilty. She approached her, "You're okay?"

Ellie nodded quickly, "Everything is fine! I just missed the turn, I'm terribly sorryâ€|" She looked at Jackson and saw that he was really worried. It was kind of sweet of him, no matter that she still couldn't understand how the hell she deserved that much attention and kindness. She smiled at him, trying to said without words how impossibly grateful she is, and Jax without doubt got that.

"C'mon, El, take a place near Hap. Wish me luck," he said and hurried to the altar. Ellie took her place and almost immediately filled with this overall atmosphere of joy and happiness. On the other side was sitting Juice and Thea, who tried to make herself look less official. She took off her jacket and rolled up shirt's sleeves, so a few tattoos were now visible. Juice smiled and then wispered something to Thea and she began to smile too.

Everyone around were talking, joking and fidgeted on their chairs because of impatience. Ellie was just looking around and couldn't understand why that woman was so preconceived about this club. At

some point she began to think that she might actually like to become a part of this little bikers' world, no matter how dangerous it might be from the other side. They were like family to each other, and that impressed her the most as a person, who barely knew what this concept means.

When Op came to the altar, Thea looked from behind Happy and said, "Hey, Ellie, don't miss a thing, it's starting", so Ellie nodded smiling. And then the wedding began.

As the music started to play, the bride appeared. She was amazingly beautiful in her small white dress, and looked a bit nervous, but totally happy. When the old man, who was Piney, brought her to the altar, she took Opie's hand almost with tears of joy in her eyes. After the standard part, it was time for the vows.

"You got theâ€|got the rings?" asked Opie, turning to Jax.

"What?" he said with surprised face, but then laughed immediately and gave them two rings. Their vows were full of love and concern. Ellie might not know them, but a simple look was enough to understand that this two love each other. They were happy, and somehow, in this very moment, Ellie was happy too.

"With this ring, I vow my love. I promise to always be a faithfull and loving wifeâ€| and old lady."

"With this ring, I vow my love. And I promise always to cherish and protect you."

"What else?" suddenly, somebody shouted behind Ellie's back. Opie rolled his eyes and continued with a smile. "And treat you as good as my leather and ride you as much as my harley," many guests shouted the last words in unison with him .

Thea laughed and gave Ellie a glance, like if she was saying "told ya". Ellie couldn't help herself, but was clapping loudly with everyone else and smiling widely, looking at Jax. He winked at her, before turning to Opie with his congratulations. After that they all moved to the tables and a small stage, where celebration was about to continue. The day flowed smoothly into the late evening.

"Why her, sweetheart?" Jax asked Lyla, looking at her bridesmaid in a short lilac dress, if anyone was able to call it so. "She's definitely not the one to invite to the wedding."

"I didn't have much choice, thought," the bride was looking a bit guilty. "It supposed to beâ€| You know. Tara. And I don't have too much friends and options as well."

"Rightâ€|" Jax pursed his lips, obviously not excited because of the mention of Tara. "Anyway, let us hope that after couple glasses of champagne Gemma will refuse the idea to ruin your wedding with a good fight," He smirked and gave Lyla a kiss on the temple, before tapping approached Op on the shoulder and going to the table where Bobby and Chibs were sitting.

"Found your girl, aye, Jackie?" Telford saluted him with his bottle of beer.

"She's not mine," despite what was said, Jax was smiling. He fell down on one of the chairs, looking around and finding Clay with his mother on the dancefloor. "Nice. Is he ready?"

"Have any doubts? He was just drinking with Putlova. Wait a bit more till it's dark enough, and we're ready to go," Bobby nodded. "And before we do, I advice you to learn from our Pres and please the girl, unless someone took her."

"Yep, someone," Chibs's voice sounded notes of laughter. He nodded in the direction of Ellie, who was already actively processed by Tig.

"Jesus!"

"Go save the princess from the dragon, hero!" Heard Jax instead of farewell.

"You know, all this freedom and stuff, when you feel like the king of the roadâ€|" Trager was activly gesticulating and throwing a thoughtful look into the distance, while Ellie was looking at him with a smile. "This is our life, baby, kind of a wonderful dreamâ€|"

"Tiggy, finish your philosophy session," Jax finally approached them and put his hand on Tig's shoulder. "Don't you have anyone else to pull the wools over their eyes?"

"Come on, Jax, I just found a grateful listener! Tell him, Ellie!" he looked at her, searching for support.

"Everything is fine, Jax," She winked at Trager. "Tig was just telling me how exciting your life is," She couldn't help herself, but giggled.

"Good for you, but, unfortunately, I'm about to steal your listener," Jax grinned and looked at Ellie. "Don't you mind?"

She didn't, so she nodded with a smile and promised Tig she'll be back to him to hear the end of his amazing stories. Trager made the movement with his hands like he was blessing them and went away to Bobby, Chibs and Juice, who had escaped from dancefloor and left Thea to talk to Happy about Tacoma.

"I'm a terrible dancer, by the way" said Ellie, taking Jax's hand. He smiled and put his arm around her, leaning a little bit closer.

"So am I, babe". As they came to the stage, the music has changed to a slower one. The night was about to fall and soon he'll leave, but not without a dance, he decided. Ellie's smile was warm and soft. Smiles like this one could easily make you go crazy, and Jax has already started going in that direction. The moment was perfect, but Ima, who appeared behind Ellie's back, destroyed it as she always do. He gave her a deadly glance, like offering her to go straight to hell. Her presence here irritated him, and Ellie noticed that immediately.

"Who is that? Looks like you guys have a history", she smirked.

"Yeah, the one where I hate this stupid slut. Don't bother yourself with her, lass. Better tell me, did you enjoy the wedding?" he asked, putting his hands on her waist. Ellie pursed her lips and Jax caught himself that he kinda like the way she's doing it.

"Every single moment of it. Thanks God you convinced me to come," she replied, putting her hands on his shoulders.

"I assume you gonna stay with us for a while then, hm? 'Cause, you know, it'd be cool," Ellie looked him directly in the eyes and smiled shyly. God knows why this guy made her feel this strange and pleasant way at the same time, but deep inside she thought that she won't forgive herself if she'll refuse.

"As you said before, I don't have any other things to do." They continued to dance silently, enjoying the moment of peace and happiness in their life as the both of them didn't feel this way for a very long time. They wished this moment never end, but someone above apparently wasn't thinking the same way.

"Jesus, I guess I get why she annoys you", said Ellie with disgust in her voice. Jax followed her gaze and saw Ima flirting with Juice in a very persistent way. He rolled his eyes, mumbling something about whores and theirs holes, but then he noticed Thea.

"Oh, shit", he said, as Martinez passed from silent drinking and angry observing to actions. "Thea!"

But she obviously didn't hear him, marching straight to Juice and Ima, who was clapping her false eyelashes and leaning to him with, probably, seductive smile. It was hard to say if Ortiz followed her charms, but it definitely pissed Thea off, anyway. In couple of seconds she was already near them and in the next moment Ima's face met the table. "Ouch!" said someone between those who saw this little show. Fortunately, the rest of the guests seemed not to give a fuck.

"Keep your hole to yourself, bitch," Almost hissed Martinez, still holding Ima by the hair. Then she made a half step back and looked around, as if she realized what just happened only now.

"Jesus, T!" saying that Juice was shocked would be like saying nothing. He was staring at his friend with eyes wide open and holding his hands like he's giving up. "What got into you?!"

She looked at him, breathing heavily, "Nothing. Nothing got into me."

"Nuts!" it's Ima finally spoke up, slightly muffled due to nose bleeding, which she pinched with a napkin wrom the table.

"The hell?!" seemed like the bride saw what happened to her braidsmaid.

"Hey, Jaxâ€ Jesus Christ!" Chibs, who just approached Ellie and Jax, noticed dramatic staging. "What a wedding without a fight, huh?"

"I would call it a punishment," Teller smirked.

"That's for the best, good sign for the marriage," he chuckled,

watching as Lyla was taking the victim away, trying not to stain her dress. Then he caught himself, "Um, sorry, lass, but I have to steal your cavalier. We gotta go, Jackie."

"Sure," he nodded and turned to Ellie. "Sorry. But I guess, you should find a company in the face of Thea, you knowâ€!"

"Of course, I'll talk to her," she replied with a smile, but stood still for a while, watching as he and Chibs are approaching one of the tables, where couple of other SAMCRO guys were talking with unfamiliar men in suits. Those people didn't inspire confidence and she suddenly felt weird, but waved it away and went to find Thea.

Martinez was shivering from head to feet with rage, being completely out of control. It was like a sudden fit of anger when she saw that bitch near Ortiz. And moreover, she hated to admit that it was not just an anger, but jealousy. And it was definitely stupid, wasn't it? So when Juice came closer to her, he just got under the hand.

"Damn it, Thea, what was that for?" He looked absolutely lost because of her actions, but there was coming another storm.

"Oh, sorry I interrupted your pussy-party. Next time warn me if you're about to fuck some slut", He tried to put his hand on her shoulder, but she just threw it away and punched him in return. "Fuck you, Ortiz. Go ahead, your club's shit is waiting for you, enjoy it", he wanted to say something and clear this up, but Tig took him away. When they were gone, Ellie came closer to Thea and hugged her unexpectedly.

"Hey, sweetheart, lets call a taxi and go home. I'm terribly tired, and you?" Thea nodded sadly and picked up her phone. She didn't feel so horrible even when she brought that news to Juice. She took Ellie by the hand with gratefulness in her eyes.

Meanwhile, Clay with Jax and Happy lead Putlova and his minions as far away as possible from the wedding's place. Tig, Juice and Chibbs were riding in the truck to the storage.

"Was it just me, or it was really hot when your lass in her business suit hit the slut's head on the table?" said Trager, imitating that moment with playful groans. Chibs smirked, saying that he's so upset to miss all the fun, but Juice didn't say a word. There could be only one proper explanation for that shitÐ± but he refused to believe that like it was something impossible. During that time Clay and others got to their destination.

"Okay, gentlemen. I think here we can check this guns without scaring a shit out of the guests," said Clay with flattering voice. Putlova nodded and gave a command to his men in Russian. All this time Jax didn't stopped smiling strangely, feeling like his scars almost burning him alive. Clay took the gun from one of Putlova's guys and made one shot in the distance, as if really cheking it. "Nice," he nodded the moment before turning around and making second shot, this time right in the head of Russian. Jax and Happy took out their own guns with lightning speed and shot everyone else, except Putlova himself.

"He's all yours, son" said Clay to Jax.

Teller slowly loaded his gun and aimed it on Putlova.

"Just business," with the sound of a shot Jax could swear the pain was finally leaving him. At the very same time in the storage guys took care about the rest of Putlova's minions.

"Russian piece of shit," said Chibs as spat on the dead bodies. There was only one last thing to do. They put corpses in the truck and rode them directly to the Charming Heights, one of the problem SAMCRO faced after their return. And few dead Russians are about to spoil Hale's election campaign.

#### 4. The Cartel

Knocking became more insistent with every second and Ellie nearly tripped over the carpet in the hallway on her way to the door. When she finally opened it, she found Juice at the doorstep, looking obviously nervous and surprised when he saw her.

"Hi! Uhmâ€| Is Thea at home?" he tried to give her a light smile, but it didn't work very well. Ellie looked back for a moment, as if trying to figure something.

"I don't actually think this is the right moment," she said after seconds of thinking. She shifted from one foot to the other, obviously feeling uncomfortable. It all was totally not her buisness and she didn't like being involved much, but Thea asked her to turn him out of door. Despite irritation in her voice, Ellie really believed that everything was not about anger, but about shame. "Look, I don't know if I'm the one to tell, but don't take it too personally. It's justâ€| you know, women," She smiled nervously.

"Yeah, sureâ€|" Ortiz seemed to be pretty dissapointed. "Then I'll come later, I think."

"Good ideaâ€|"

"Screw him already!" Suddenly, Thea's voice sounded from somewhere inside the house.

When Ellie cunducted the guest in the most gantle way, she returned to the bedroom, where Martinez was sitting on the bed, pretending to read a newspaper.

"He looked worried," she said, stopping at the doorway and leaning against the door jamb with her shoulder.

"Glad for him," Thea defiantly flipped the page. Her gaze caught on an article about the corpses which were found near Charming Heights. "Nice, dead bodies!"

"You know, it can get better if you tell me what's wrong," Ellie ignored her attempt to change the subject. "You're not supposed to trust me, or something, butâ€|"

"It's not about trust," Martinez suddenly postponed the newspaper. She looked at her involuntary roommate unexpectedly straight. "For

some reasons, I feel that telling you something won't be a mistake. But I have no idea what to say, that's the problem," her last words were drowned in a noisy sigh. She covered her eyes with her hand. "I don't know what happened and it drives me crazy. Literally," Bitter laugh slipped from her lips.

"Don't you?" after a small pause, Ellie sat on the edge of the bed. "If you'd asked me, I would say that it looked like a scene of jealousy."

Thea let out a martyr moan, "Really?"

"Yeah, definitely."

She shook her head, trying to lock up her memories and to calm down, but soon she failed and fall on the bed. At the beginning she started to laugh, but soon it came up to sobbing. Ellie lay down near, saying no word, waiting until Thea will be able to speak for herself. She needed to share that shit that've been devoured her from the inside and Ellie knew that feeling better than anyone else.

"Well, I guess, it was jealousy after all," she opened her eyes and took a deep breath. What she was about to say was hard. Like, freaking hard. By saying that she was about to admit that the shit that she tried to left behind in Queens, apparently, won't leave her that easily. "We used to live together in Queens. I was a freak-student, he was a computer-nerd, best neighbours ever. And I think I justâ€¦ I've been in love with him all this fucking time. Like, from now this is really huge amount of time. But he never actually looked at me like, you know, like the guy would look at any woman, and I accepted that. And then he left. Moved here to save his ass, so I thought that I'm finally free. With all that work, and courts, and other crap you just don't have time for self-analysis, and that was good. But here I am. Jesus, he thinks I'm insane," She covered her face with her arms and started to cry, leaning closer to Ellie, who hugged her and began to stroking her hair.

"Nah, sweetheart, he doesn't. He is confused, yes, and very upset because you refused to talk to him. That means he care. I'm afraid I'm not a good adviser in cases like this, but somehow I'm pretty sure he cares about you even more than you think. You need to talk to him, Thea", but she refused immediately, shaking her head.

"Iâ€¦ can't do that"

"Come on, you beat whores and you're afraid to talk to a man? That's ridiculous," Ellie smiled softly. "It was quite cool punch, by the way," she said, giggling. "If only you could see their faces, T, you were the star! So you can punch him the same way if he'll be a jerk." They started to laugh together, feeling a little relief that at least one secret was revealed.

"Oh, I saw your face when you were dancing with VP," Thea said cheerfully. "In fairness I must say, that Jax's look wasn't any different. You two, guys, seem to like each other, huh?" she teased her playfully. Ellie felt like her cheeks began to turn red immediately. But it wasn't that easy, though. She looked away, trying to hide the confusion.

"Kinda," finally, Ellie replied quietly. It was pretty foolish to

deny the fact that she really liked Jax, but not including her unwillingness to seem windy, she also was afraid to define such a recent acquaintance in any way. In case it will end soon. Moreover, if it's going to end bad. But Martinez wasn't satisfied with answer like that. She sat up on one elbow, trying to catch Ellie's eye.

"What do you mean 'kinda'?" She raised one of her eyebrow. "You either like him, or you don't."

"Yep, you're the one to say that," Ellie smirked, changing the subject in this way. She slowly stood up, running a hand through her hair. When after a couple of seconds she turned to Thea, something weird was in her smile, "Would you give me a lift to Teller-Morrow? What a pity it would be if I'll get lost again."

"Naah," Martinez narrowed her eyes, "I know your plan, it won't work."

"What plan?" Ellie naively clapped her eyelashes. She really couldn't call an attempt to push Thea and Juice face to face at the club a full-fledged plan. Just a little try. However, it really seemed to fail.

"C'mon, conspirator. I'll lift you to that district, it's on my way. There you certainly won't get lost," she smirked, standing up too. While they were giving themselves up, Thea unconsciously was turning back to Ellie's words. She might have been not ready to do it now, but still she saw some sense in her words. Talking to Juice would be the right thing. If she only knew how to do that.

And while women were women, others' morning began with some less exalted issues. Clay and Jax were riding back from the meeting with the Mayans and the Cartel and a small truck was overwhelmed with heavy silence. It was obvious that both of them were in a bad mood, but Morrow hid it much better then his step-son, whose anger was visible in almost white knuckles of hands which he clutched on the steering wheel. Clay expected this kind of reaction, so didn't say anything, deciding to wait until this silent storm calms down. But he was the only one who knew what to expect.

Jax couldn't decide for himself, what infuriated him more: the need to deal with the drugs, or the fact that Clay knew everything, but said nothing. The meeting went obviously not as he expected it to, and staying calm after suddenly appeared details was pretty hard. Just as hard was to keep himself from punching Clay right in the face for involving club in that shit without letting anyone know. In fact, he put SAMCRO in the situation, where to refuse the cartel would mean to incite an uncontrollable consequences. Actually, everything about the cartel was uncontrollable and it was scaring the shit out of Jax in advance. Anyway, he couldn't stand alone against Clay's arguments on favor of this deal. He could only hope that the vote will put everything on its place. And what he knew for sure - the others won't be excited about this news.

He was totally right. When they got to the club, everyone were already at their places, discussing some pointless shit without expecting what was about to come very soon. They were laughing, finishing their beers and Jax, who thought he started to calm down a bit, now understood that he's even further from bloody calmness than

he thought.

"She just screwed me, man! It's like I should be begging her for forgiveness, or what?" Yelled Juice, while Piney and Bobby laughed harder. Tig put his hands on Ortiz's shoulders and said, giggling:

"That's why I prefer hookers. No problems, only joy, peace and happiness. I could suggest you the same, shithead, but I'm afraid your Zena in business suit will cut off your dick, or worse!" Actually, could anything be worse?" he turned to Bobby.

"No doubts," the thing was even funnier cause everyone knew that they weren't dating. And looking at Juice, who just couldn't find a place for himself like a teenager boy, was a new way to entertain themselves.

"End your chatting, ladies, we have some things to discuss," said Clay as he entered the clubhouse and walked straight to the room with the table with reaper. Everyone left their beers immediately, and walked after him. As the door behind them closed and everyone were on their places, Clay began. With every word that slipped from his mouth, the air was getting more and more tense. Yeah, the cartel shit was very profitable, very perspective in some way, but all this drugs? None of them wanted to take part in something so dark like this.

"Cartel gave us protection in prison so now we owe them," said Clay without looking anybody in the eyes.

Jax thought that he already decided for himself. He didn't need anybody's approval, he will do that, he will take his cash and he'll make sure everyone will follow his orders. Jax never thought he will ever hate his step-father that much.

"Come on, do we even discuss this?! It's goddamn Cartel! This hole is deep, Clay, and dangerous. It will end bad, you know that!" shouted Piney from the opposite side of the table. Deep inside Jax was agree with him, but he also knew that refusal to Galinda may have affects on those who are dear to them. These guys were way too dangerous to play with them.

"Look, despite I hate this as much as you do, I think it's worth the risk. We have to pay them back for their protection, cause without it the Russians would beat the shit out of us. And it will bring us more money than we could earn with other gangs. Mayans will help us, the transportation gonna be fast and quiet. And it's temporary. Right, Clay?" he asked, turning to Morrow. After a moment he nodded, confirming it. Jax was overstepping himself, but he obviously thought that Clay put them in an impossible position. Everyone were confused and totally not sure about this, and that definitely started to piss Clay off.

"Okay, let us all think about this until tomorrow. Then we'll have a vote," with thud of his hammer meeting was over. Before Jax managed to stand up, Morrow called him, "You go to Wahewa and check everything. Take Op with you."

Teller just nodded and hurried to leave to minimize the possibility of creating another quarrel. He called Opie, and simply by his look

he understood that he is waiting for a hard drive. And confrontation with his best friend was just one of the problems that he was awaiting from cooperation with Galinda.

By the time Jax and Op left, Ellie just got to Teller-Morrow. As she promised, Thea lifted her up to the nearest quarter and in a couple of minutes she was already approaching the clubhouse, having huge doubts about what she's even doing here. She justified herself by the fact that she has banally nowhere else to go, so if she was about to figure out what to do next, she could find help only here. It was, of course, risky so simply trust kind of first comer, but it happened instinctively. So when she entered the club, she more or less coped with their own doubts and was ready to act on the situation.

"Ooh, my angel came down to me!" After yesterday, when they got along very well, it wasn't a surprise that Tig was the first to greet her.

"Just to bless you, Alexander," She smiled, noting to herself that despite a small spectacle played be Trager, he was not in the mood. Just as everyone else.

"I definitely like this girl, let's keep her," he threw his arm over her shoulders.

"You really just called him Alexander, didn't you?" Bobby was just crossing the room, going to the bar, and without waiting for an answer, he grinned.

"That's kinda privilege, lass," she noticed Chibs, who was sitting near the pool table. "But be aware, it might be not good as you think."

"Drop it!" she smirked, but then became more serious. The atmosphere of ill humor was too obvious. "Is everything okay?"

"Don't bother yourself with this, child, everything is fine," Munson rattled the bottles behind the bar. "Are you looking for Jax?"

"He left just before you came," Tig let her go so she could come farther, approaching the bar and sitting on one of the chairs.

"Right, I'm! Uhm!" Ellie bit distractedly tucked a strand behind her ear. "I guess I just came because for now it's the only place where I can go. I was wondering, maybe, you know? Maybe you'll help me?"

"With what?" Bobby leaned a bit forward.

"Everything?" She laughed bitterly. "I have no idea what to do now. I obviously can't go home!"

"Hell no!" Protested Telford, who knew a part of her story. "Why won't you stay in Charming, sweetheart? Despit the fact that our mayor is a big dick, this place isn't so bad."

"Yeah, I know, it's more that 'not so bad', but I don't want to make troubles or something," Judging by her voice, it really bothered her. "I'm a bit helpless right now."

"Nonsense!" Tig thumped his hand on the table. "I think we will find where to attach you, angel."

"Sure," Bobby shrugged. "Even here, at Teller-Morrow, is some work to do. I guess Chucky won't mind a comrade," he grinned.

"The question is whether you won't mind Chucky," everyone laughed haskily at this remark, except Ellie, who just silently smiled. She was about to reply something and say that she is grateful, but she missed the moment, 'cause the door opened and Juice with some yet unfamilliar guy entered the club.

"Hey, Jax's is on the phone, looking for Clay," Ortiz was apparently nervous.

"Says it's important," added the new guy, who was Kozik. After this addition, other guys stood up immediately and gathered around the phone on the bar, switching the line on it.

"Jax?" Bobby was the one who spoke. And listened. And as he did, his face darkened more and more. "Hold on," He said and turned to others. "We need to find Clay, immediately."

Fortunately, just as he said this, they all heard the sound of motorcycle engine outside. Tig went out to find out that it was exactly Clay and hurried him. When Morrow finally took up the phone, the voice with very strong Russian accent said him to bring the guns in one hour or he will kill VP and his friend. The shitty Russians began to really annoy him. He made another call and said to Hap and Rat to bring the guns to the garage. Ellie heard only some parts of the conversation, but that totally made her nervous. She didn't know what's going on, but she understood quite clearly that Jax is in trouble, and that caused a small hand tremor. She unconsciously followed them outside, when Gemma appeared too. She understood immediately that something happened to Jax, but soon another problem showed up on the horizon.

"Bad time," said Bobby as everyone could hear the sirens. When sheriff came out of his car, Clay whispered to Gemma to call Bastards and send them to Waheva. No one had to ask what sheriff forgot here. Roosevelt had no doubts about involvement of SAMCRO in that shit with the dead Russians at the Charming Heights, but he couldn't prove it, no matter how hard he tried. So he decided at least to please himself and show to Sons that their actions will not be unanswered. Very soon a fire engine showed up, and sheriff said with a sarcastic smile:

"You smell smoke?" And without continuing he went to the clubhouse. Everyone followed him, anticipating the worst. Roosevelt looked around and stopped in front of the wall with photos of SAMCRO members that were made at the police station. While he was staring at them, Tig whispered to Clay that Gemma made some calls and they must hurry, cause Bastards was out of town. Clay nodded and said to Roosevelt:

"Okay, you made your point, we got that. Now get out of our club and take your cheerleading group with you," But it seemed like he wasn't about to leave any soon.

"There are no black on this wall."

"We have no problems with the color."

"Yeah, an oasis of toleration," And Clay understood what is gonna be next. Normally, he would do anything to not let that bastard even breath inside this place, but time was precious.

"Just do it already," He said impatiently, and Roosevelt did. With uncovered pleasure, he raised his ax and struck the first blow against the wall. Ellie, who silently stood behind them all this time, covered her mouth with gasp when he started to break everything around him. After the wall he stepped to the room with the meeting table, continuing to play his small preformance. And the shittest part for everyone was the inability to do something about it. They could just stay still and watch like some stupid piece of shit was damaging their club. When he was done, Roosevelt came closer to Clay and said to him, very quiet and slowly:

"Thanks God we were here to prevent the fire," His lips curled into a sneer. "You know, Clay, we can live in peace, or at least pretend to, but you pessed me do that. And I suggest you not to do it again. Hope we understood each other," And commanding firefighters and police officers by nod to follow him, he went out. Being absolutely crushed, everyone tried to wave it all away for now, cause on the first place they still got that shit in Wahewa, where Jax and Opie were lying on the floor with bonded arms. They understood perfectly that guys wouldn't make it in one hour.

"Shitty honeymoon, man," they laughed nervously. As the silence around was broken with the sound of a coming car, Russians raised them to their feet and slowly walked outside. Saying that Jax was surprised to see Romero would be an understatement. And he was even more surprised, when in the next minutes Romero with his compadres shot most part of the Russian bastards, saving the rest of them for SAMCRO's pleasure. He was grateful, of course, and what is more important, he understood that after this hand of help they just couldn't say 'no' to Galinda. It came out as a neat trick to tie them even tighter. Almost immediately after that, Clay and others showed up.

"Missed all the fun, as always," said Tig disappointed.

After a little conversation with Romeo, where he clearly hinted that he hoped that they will make a right choice about cooperation, SAMCRO in full was able to return home.

Or at least to the rest of it. Ruined clubhouse was a truly painful picture to see, so Gemma hid in her office, feeling that her heart began to ache with every new breath more and more. She worried about Jax and that demage that sheriff brought to them, but there was also another thing that didn't left her in peace. After a few minutes on her own, she couldn't resist an unhealthy desire to kind of torture herself with it once more, so she opened a drawer and took out a folder of latters. Going throught them one by one, she peered into that too familiar handwriting of John Teller, who wrote to his mistress about how everything here became alien to him. Echo of jealousy still sounded inside of her, echo of hate and anger to this man and his other woman.

She found this letters when she was unpacking Jax's things after their return from Ireland. First of all she was shocked by the fact that Maureen Ashby dared to secretly put them into her son's backpack. Then she was angry because this letters even existed, and were saved till nowadays. She wanted to throw them away or even to burn in the trashcan at the back yard once and for all, but something stopped her from doing that. Irrational desire to know what her husband been writing to his fancy was too strong, so she couldn't help herself, but read them. It turned out that in addition to the endless outpouring of thoughts and feelings, John shared with her some of his suspicions and beliefs that could turn these letters into a literal weapon. A loaded gun that Maureen Ashby almost put into Jax's and and that was aimed on her and Clay.

"Stupid Irish bitch," She hissed, throwing a folder back to the drawer and closing it with her foot. Every woman is a danger - that's what she has learned a hundred of times. Even that whore, who will disappear in the morning, can bring a lot of problems and become a total disaster and there is no insurance from that. And Ashby proved that the woman even don't have to be present to start some shit going around. So being protective was kind of an instinct, and last days this instinct was almost screaming in case of appearance of some new women on the horizon. She spread the jalousie with her fingers, looking out. Blonde still was there, sitting outside the clubhouse. Her baby-doll face could, probably, delude any man, but Gemma wasn't about to trust her not even for a bit. Jax promissed to explain her presence and who the hell she even was, but he still didn't, though Gemma wasn't upset about that at all. She didn't care, actually, because she was convinced: this pretty doll won't stay for long. They all were gone after all, just like Tara. And in the next moment after that thought she smirked, 'cause she saw Lyla's car. Well, some of this dolls went beyond the others. When she went out to meet Opie's new wife, she already parked and got out of the car.

"What's wrong? Where is Opie?" she erased the distance between her and Gemma in couple of hurried steps.

"He's fine, sweetheart," Teller put her hand on Lyla's shoulder. "Something happened, but they've solved everything already. They're on their way."

"Oh," she covered her eyes in relief, and then whispered, making Gemma laugh a bit, "Hell of a honeymoon."

At that time, Ellie were sitting at the table near the club, nervously playing with the earring. As she heard the sound of approaching bikes, she stood up and came closer to the place where Gemma and Lyla were waiting for the guys. Her heart started to beat faster as she saw Jax, alive and unharmed, except some bruises on his face. Gemma hugged him tight as well as Lyla kissed Oppie, whispering sweet nothings in his ear. It was a usual thing for the women of this club - wait for their men to come back after their missions, counting hours and preparing themselves for worse. That what meant to be a part of this family, and that was what Ellie were desperately searching for. Someone to whom she could be so devoted.

"Oh God, Jax, are you alright? I've heard you were captured," she came to him as Gemma let him go and her eyes were full of sincere concern and worry. Tara used to give him that look in the hardest moments of past years and that was the only way for him to handle the

shit that was around him. But now Tara was gone and for the first time that fact didn't hurt him, cause he got that look that he needed anyway. It gave him a sense of relief. So as Ellie appeared in front of him, he just came closer and embraced her without words, hiding his face in her hair.

"Thank you, El," he said quietly after a few seconds. She was confused, he could almost sense that, but soon enough she hugged him back, leaning closer, hearing his heartbeat.

"For what?"

"For being here," she smiled lightly after his words, 'cause it was, probably, the best thing he could say to her. Thea was right, after all. She liked him, maybe more than she could admit, and it scared her to death, and at the same time it was slowly driving her crazy. But she will think about it later, right now Jax needed her and she was about to be here for him.

"I amazed with his goddamn talent to find these pussies," said Gemma, resting her hand on Clay's shoulder. He smirked, but decided not to mention that Jax was acting just like his father. He kissed his wife gently and walked to the ruined clubhouse right after Jax and Ellie. When they were inside, Jax felt like the anger started to boil inside his body. The devastation was everywhere. Basically, Roosevelt didn't left any stone unturned.

"Stupid bastard," whispered Jax, clenching his fists. Ellie put her arm on his shoulder, showing him that he's not alone in this. At the very same moment, Thea parked her car and hurried to the clubhouse. She heard about sheriffs visit and after all her anxiety was stronger than any cockroaches in her head, so she dropped everything and rushed to the club, expecting the worst. When she finally came in, she couldn't help the loud sigh. It wasn't a surprise that no one could really greet her, being totally suppressed. Martinez made a few quiet steps forward, trying to find Juice among the others, and when she finally did, her next words slipped from her lips absolutely involuntarily:

"What the hell is on your head, Ortiz?!" Juice immediatly turned on the sound of her voice, looking completely confused. He shaved his mohawk again, opening the tattoos and looking totally different to her.

"Won't believe, Zena, we're asking him about this for many years," responded Tig, provoking a couple of snickers.

In the next moment they grew into a full-fledged laughter, that inside this disturbed walls sounded a bit nervously, but promising. After all, how could they let some piece of shit destroy their spirit?

## 5. Daddy issues

Today was supposed to be a really hard day. Not just because of guns, not because of preparing everything for the transportation, but because today the club needed to vote up or against the partnership with the Cartel. Jax knew that Piney, Bobby and Juice are totally against it. Kozik, as a former junky, would probably support them. He

was sure about Tig, was sure about his own vote. But not about his feelings about all of this, though it didn't matter, because nobody gave a shit about his personal thoughts, especially Clay. And he also needed to have a conversation with Op and try to convince him about all of this. Yeah, very long and very hard fucking day. But Jax decided to spend at least a little part of it with his little monster, so he brought him to the club, where for the past day the most of the debris has been removed. They were alone, not counting a few prospects and Chucky, hanging somewhere around. Abel liked this place, and Jax was happy about that. After all, the club is gonna be his one day. Being captured by his thoughts, he missed the moment when Ellie appeared.

"Didn't expect to see you this soon," He said, raising his head and smiling widely to Ellie.

"Thea has a court hearing today, so she left early and gave me a quick ride," She explained, coming closer and sitting down next to him, smiling at a little boy in his hands, who was playing with his car.

"Hey, Abel, say hello to daddy's new friend, Ellie," She raised her eyebrows, being a bit surprised, but couldn't help herself, looking at blond-haired boy with Jax's eyes and smile. This was the first time she met his son, and from this moment he completely captivated her heart.

It felt like hours passed them by. At first Abel was a little bit ashamed, but soon he overpassed that and played with Ellie like if he always knew her. Jax was amazed with how quickly they found a common ground and became friends, and with how lovely and beautiful Ellie was, laughing at every Abel's joke and resisting him in his games.

"What?" She asked, giggling, when she noticed the way Jax was looking at her.

"Nothing, just trying to keep this picture in my mind," He said. But this happiness couldn't last forever and was broken by appearance of Clay and others. He knew that he had to go now, so he gave Abel to Ellie, placing a kiss on son's head before it. "Can you stay with him till Gemma will come, please?"

"Sure, I'll keep an eye on him. Be careful, Jax," She said, blushing as he hugged her and gave a little kiss on a cheek. It seemed like the skin was burning there.

"Always, babe," He said and waved goodbye. After he left, Abel seemed to be completely immersed in the game, and he wasn't embarrassed not even for a bit by the fact that he was left alone with Ellie. They began to draw, and by the time Gemma finally showed up, Teller Jr. already painted himself and Ellie dirt, and this fact seemed to bring him a pure delight. They both were laughing when the old lady approached, and under her look Ellie's smile faded considerably. Noticing that, the boy turned around and saw his grandmother.

"Granny, look what we have drawn with Ellie!" He almost shouted in excitement.

"Wow, that's definitely a masterpiece!" Gemma stood behind him, putting her hands on his shoulders. "And who's Ellie?"

"Daddy said she is his new friend," He smiled, looking at Ellie. Unfortunately, the love of a grandson didn't automatically mean the favor of his grandmother.

"Right, daddy, as usual, has a lot of friends," She clicked her tongue.

"I guess, we don't know each other personally, but just as Abel said, I'm Ellie," She stood up, extending her hand. A few seconds was enough to understand that the woman wasn't about to shake it, so she continued a bit uncertainly, "Jax asked me to sit with him till you'll come."

"Well, I came," Teller's whole appearance was showing her displeasure. She looked down, at the boy, and tried to erase a paint stain, "Just look at you, sweetheart! C'mon, see Chucky over there? Quickly, run to him and say that granny asked him to clean you up!"

With a loud sigh, Abel did what he was told to, but before he did, he said goodbyes to Ellie, which seemed to annoy Gemma.

"See ya, sweetie!" The girl replied, not hiding a wide smile as he was running across the yard, making a sound of working engine. When she turned back to his granny, she tried her best not to let that smile disappear, because she wasn't about to let this woman to put pressure on her. "He's a wonderful kid."

"He definitely is," Gemma answered without any sign of a smile in respond. "The question is, why are you able to judge?"

"Excuse me?"

"Jax wouldn't introduce the first comer to his son."

"Then, maybe, I'm not the first comer?" Ellie crossed her arms. She didn't notice the moment when she passed from the attempts to be nice to the position of defence.

"Then who the hell are you?" She leaned a bit closer across the table. "What are you doing here, honey?"

"Do you have any problems with me being here? I haven't caused any troubles to anyone yet."

"Yet," Gemma chuckled. "My problem is that my son seems to put the eye on you. And the last thing he need is a new whore by his side."

"First of all, I didn't give you any reason to call me a whore," Ellie felt the touch of a strong irritation. She stood up slowly, not taking her eyes from Gemma. "Second of all, Jax also seems to be a big boy, so, I guess, he can decide by himself whether he need someone beside him, or not."

"You didn't have to give me some reasons, I can recognize a whore if I see one. So either Jax is a big boy, or he is not, I'm afraid I

won't let it happen."

"Well, I'm glad that you're okay with you confidence," She replied with a smile, being ready to leave. "Hope it won't break on reality." And with this words, she went straight to the clubhouse, ignoring Gemma's look that followed her right to the doors.

By the time the atmosphere at Teller-Morrow grew tense, Jax and Clay finally got to the storage, where Tig, Bobby, Op and Juice with other prospects were busy with preparing the boxes for the guns transporting according to the Irish drawings. Clay was completely satisfied with the results.

"Where's Chibs, by the way?" Asked Jax as he noticed that scotty got lost somewhere. After a moment Telford appeared, looking like shit and breathing heavy because of pain.

"Jesus, are you alright, man?"

"Stupid mexican food," He moaned, lying on one of the prepared boxes. "Juicy-boy, you gotta save me," And Juice was totally ready to save him with his magical green tea, the effects of which he immediately started to share with everyone, but Tig stopped him from enumerating the charming details of this treatment.

"You gonna be done with the boxes here, then enjoy your enemas," said Clay and then called Bobby to come to Wahewa with him. The tension between them began to annoy Morrow, so he was about to try to convince him about Cartel once more. Before leaving, Bobby gave Tig a meaningful look, but Trager was already pissed off. He was tired of being Clay's little puppet, and moreover, he didn't understand why his friend now seemed not to need him anymore.

At the same time, sheriff Roosevelt and mr. Potter, new pain in the ass, Assistant Attorney whose got Sons as one of his objects, were discussing their new plan. Somehow they found out that the SAMCRO is now connected with the Galinda Cartel, and that could gave them an opportunity to catch them both at the same time. The only problem was that they needed a rat in their ranks to fix the arms trade and then put Sons under the Rico. Potter took a case from his table and passed it to Roosevelt.

"So, here's a plan B. We take one of them and we make him work for us," He pointed at the photo on the wall. "Juan Carlos Ortiz, more known as Juice. You need to arrest him."

"And then what? How this would help us anyway?" Roosevelt seemed to be not very enthusiastic about all of this. Despite his confrontation with the club, all this conspirative shit didn't bring him any joy at all, though he didn't have much choice.

"He's gonna be our little rat," Smirked Potter, opening the case and pointing on the photo in it. "Just tell him that you know about his wonderful family tree and that you'll be in touch in case he would like to discuss something," He was about to play a great puppet show, without having any doubts that it'll work. And thought he didn't know it yet, everything was already coming to the point where his plan will succeed.

Meanwhile in Wahewa, Miles called Jax with some bad news. The rest of

the SAMCRO, who wasn't at the storage, were solving the problem with the transportation of guns, and it seemed like someone decided to transport them already. By stealing it. "Fuck, is there always must be some shit with those guns?! Okay, we're on our way".

"Something's wrong?"

"Kozik screwed up. You stay here, Tig, finish with the boxes while we're fixing the problem," But Tig was done with that shit.

"If there's a problem, then I'm going, VP" And that's how Jax understood that there were no reasons to argue with him. He nodded and turned to Juice before leaving:

"Take care of him."

"Absolutely."

As they left, Ortiz helped Chibs to stand up, "C'mon, man, let's save you already."

And Telford wasn't the only one who wanted to be saved. It was hard to admit that, but despite the resistance, which Ellie showed when talking to Gemma, this brief meeting literally knocked the ground from under her feet. She had met that kind of woman, she had met them a lot, but now she just wasn't ready for this passive (or, maybe, not even passive) aggressive shit. Standing in the bathroom and trying to clean her cheek from paint, she felt as her eyes were burning and she hated that condition when she was about to start to cry, but couldn't let herself do that. Anyway, after a few seconds of attempts to pretend that nothing happened, she just sat on the edge of the bathtub and hid her face in her hands, trying to breath deeply. Probably, everything that happened to her in last few days just finally caught her in the moment of helplessness. It seemed like the eternity passed by till she was able to went out of the room and leave in hurry, without any wish to stay at the club while there was nobody else, but Gemma. That's how she found a little weakness, one of the many. While she was heading to the gate, she heard Abel calling her, but she just turned around and waved him with a smile, thinking to herself, "Why such a nice child has such a bitchy granny."

Having nowhere to go, as well as Thea was, probably, still in the court, Ellie decided to hike. The risk to get lost again was pretty high, but in that moment it didn't bother her much, so she just went aimlessly, trying to throw away Gemma's words. I didn't work vert well, actually, untill she saw no one else, but Juice and Chibs on the other side of a street. She was about to cross it, but just before she did, the police car drove past. Everything happened pretty fast and until she could get to them, one of the officers have already put handcuffs on Ortiz.

"Is this some kind of joke?!" She heard his voice that sounded absolutely perplexed.

"Is that feel like a joke?" The officer responded, pushing him to the car.

"Chibs!" Ellie finally approached Telford, who was now alone, as well as a police car with Juice has already left. "What happened?"

"Hey, what are you doing here, lass?" He was obviously confused.

"I was walking and just saw you. Why did they take him?" She watched the car until it disappeared around the corner.

"I wish I knew," Chibs's voice was full of anxiety. He ran his hand through his hair, clearly puzzling over how to proceed. "Whateverâ€| Are you coming to the club?"

"No, actually, I left it recently," Ellie looked away. "I was there with Abel, but thenâ€|" She broke.

"Oh, you can not continue, I guess I know what's the problem," He grinned. "Everything's okay?"

"Yeah," Ellie waved. "Just don't want to be there now. Thea should be home soon, I guess I need to tell her about Juice."

"Right," He clicked his tongue. "But tell her not to worry, that's not a big deal, for real."

"Why I don't have any doubts?" She grinned, letting Chibs squeeze her shoulder.

When they parted, she went to Thea's house and Telford headed to the club. The darkness was about to fall soon. This was a constant, a simple in it's pure way truth that this town knew. But despite all of that hell, everyone was trying to live in this very moment while they still can. When you first put on the cut, you realize that one day you will end badly, taken by the road, law or a stray bullet, and if you're not ready to accept that, that you're not ready to wear it. But on the other hand, you also start to see things clearer, to understand everything you couldn't understand before. You're finally revealing the truth, you find your home, your peace, your family. Once you bacome a Son, you're always will be one. And once you choose to be with a Son, you accept the shit that will fall on your shoulders one day. And Ellie, who was hurrying home, couldn't yet understand all that boiling feeling inside of her, couldn't admit that, but she was already related with the club, and so was Thea. They choose their way, and very soon there will be consequences.

Ellie opened the door with the key that Thea gave her this morning and called her, but walls answered with the silence of an empty house. She put her key on the table and went to the kitchen to take a beer.

At the same time, two officers brought Juice to the police station and sent him to Roosevelt. More than being pissed off, he was scared, knowing that things like this are bad for someone who's still on a conditional release. After a moment of pointless story about Roosevelt and his father, he finally started the pressure.

"Do you ever see your father?"

"No," Juice answered fast, smile quickly fading away. A shadow of unemotional smile touched sheriff's lips.

"I can arrange that," He took Juice's case from his table, the one

that Potter gave him before, and opened it in front of him. "Michael Howard Cole, that's your daddy, Juan Carlos. But by your silence I assume that you already know it."

"I know who he is, but I never met him," the tattoo under his mohawk began to burn. Yes, he never met him and he never wanted to. And sometimes he even believed in that lie he created for himself.

"I'm not sure if you can see that by the picture, but he is black. Likeâ€| african-black."

"Yeah, I picked that up," After those words Juice realized what was this all about, and he felt a wave of hate to the sheriff with all his heart. As well as to his father too. He hated this situation and his own helplessness, and he wanted it to end.

"Now, let's imagine what club is gonna do to you when they'll find out that you're blackâ€| Guess, they'll rip your patch off? Make you reduce your tattoos, and then, if you'll be lucky enough, you'll walk out alive. And you will be nothing, like you never existed in the SAMCRO."

"You don't know a shit about my club," Juice said harshly.

"Yeah, you're right. I don't know a shit about it, but I know about him," He pointed at the case and smiled victoriously, "Everything." Then he took out the weed, for which Juice was allegedly arrested, and threw it to him. His main task was done, "Enjoy your day."

"So what happens now?" Roosevelt looked at him with widest smile, like Juice was nothing, but a piece of shit which he can treat the way he like.

"We go back to our families. I'll stay in touch, brother," He grinned. Juice swallowed hard and then hastened to get out of that place. He didn't feel this way for a very long time, and now the shiver came back, the thoughts started to become louder than they should be. He hoped that Roosevelt was wrong, he wanted to believe that, but what if he wasn't? The club was everything to him, and almost for the first time that he've been a part of it, he felt like he can actually loose it.

By the time Juice came back to the clubhouse, pushing away all that awful thoughts, Jax already solved the problem with the guns. It took a time and patience, but now they all were about to deal with something worse than that. Returning with the guys to the club, where everyone was gathering for the vote, he was at least sure that he got one more voice in support. Kozik felt guilty about his mistake, so he decided to atone it with his vote. Actually, Jax didn't know if he was satisfied with that. Despite he knew what his own vote is gonna be, deep inside he wanted everything to end with refusal, and if only the amount of those who are against will be biggerâ€| But then he always returned to that reasons that have formed his own decision about that. Safety of the club and those who were close to it. Jesus, he hoped so much that choosing the smallest evil will means this safety.

"Alright, let's finish with this shit," said Clay instead of greetings, when they finally parked their bikes and the rest of the Sons were already at the table. Everyone could feel clearly that the

tense was growing stronger with every single minute. This vote was about to decide the fate of the club for at least the nearest future.

"So," uttered Morrow, not looking anyone straight in the eyes. "Today's vote is about running drugs for the Galinda Cartel," After a short pause he started first, "Yay."

One by one the votes were given and it was obvious how hard for everyone was both to say up and against. And both of the opposite votes sounded like a death sentence. By the time it was Jax's turn to say his word, Chibs, Piney, Hap, Bobby and Juice already said 'no', making the amounts of votes equal.

It was up to Teller how everything was going to end. And with a heavy heart, he said, "Yay."

"Six up, five against. We're accepting the offer." And the sound of President's hammer was like the sound of the funeral bell. Everyone left in a total silence, someone was calming down their last doubts, someone - choking their anger. There was no point of saying something out loud, everything was decided. That's how it worked in the club, and if you weren't ready to accept the fact that sometimes you had to act against your own will, then, again, you weren't ready to be one of the Sons. But humility they all experienced in their own way. While one of them stayed at the clubhouse, occupying the bar, others sat on their bikes and went on a ride to clean their head.

One of those who choose Harley instead of Jim Beam was Juice, whose ride wasn't too long, though. He, probably, realized where he was going only when he got there. He saw the light in the window of Thea's house with some kind of relief. When he knocked, he didn't know for sure what he's gonna say to her. He just needed her by his side right now, or he will definitely fall apart, 'cause there was too many shit for one day. And he knew that despite everything that happened, she will take care of him just like she always did. When Thea opened the door, she was absolute mess with her tousled hair and worried look.

"Thanks God, Juan," She rushed to him, pulling Juice into a hug. He never liked his actual name for many reasons, but somehow in Thea's lips it always sounded different, more kindly, so he could almost feel himself special. "I worried so much. Ellie saw how they took you. Chibs told her that it wasn't a big deal, but how would he know?! They should've told me earlier, I could've come there, talk to them andâ€|" Juice put his hand on her cheek, trying to smile encouragingly.

"It's okay, T, nothing to worry about," He said, petting her hair. Both of them understood clearly that nothing was okay, but she knew that sooner or later he will share his problems with her. At that moment the only thing that mattered was that Juice was at home, and he was safe. "Just uhâ€|club-shit, you know," he shook his head, without knowing how to explain all of that happened, "I'm sorry, T, but can I stay with you tonight, please? I justâ€| don't wanna go home," Thea nodded silently, taking him by the hand and getting into the house. The same moment Ellie went out, saying 'hi and bye' on her go. She understood immediately that her presence wasn't quite needed, so leaving was an obvious thing to do. Withal, Jax, probably, was already at the club, so she thought it would be right to see

him.

"Wait for me inside," Martinez gave Juice a little smile and quickly came to Ellie. "Thank you," She said quietly, hugging her. "Here, take my car, it's getting dark, so you shouldn't walk alone," She gave her the key, and before Ellie could refuse, she smiled and walked back to the house, where Juice was still looking around and slightly smiling at some old photos. A few moments later she brought two bottles of beer and gave one to him. "So, you gonna tell me what happened?" Thea said as they sat on the couch. Juice made a sip and looked her directly in the eyes, as if weighing whether to speak clearly.

"We stuck deep in shit, Thea," He finally uttered. After all, despite her attempts to separate herself from the club, she was related to it. "Drugs is not what we do, but Clay wanted it and now we're in. Like, completely, we totally are in a partnership with the Cartel. These people are dangerous, and I don't really wanna do that, but do we have a choice?" Of course they didn't. So now he just needed to accept that fact and find a way to make things work. "Anyway, there's no sense to talk about that. What's done is done," He made another sip and then laid down on her lap. She started to trace the contours of one of his tattoo with her fingers.

"You can handle that shit, Juan. Even with this crap on your head," Juice smiled tiredly.

"One of us had to keep that punk-traditions, T," He said, resting his hand on Thea's. She continued to talk about some pointless stuff just to make him forget for a moment about his problems, and very soon Ortiz fell asleep to the sound of her voice, being too damn tired of today's mess.

And while Thea was comforting Juice after his bad day, Ellie got to the club, where everything seemed to be too quiet. It wasn't the silence of the late evening that reigned in the yard, it was the silence full of something unspoken and nondescript. She parked near the garage, feeling a bit weird being at the wheel again, and was about to enter the clubhouse, when she heard her name that sounded from somewhere above.

"On the roof." It was Jax. He really was sitting on the roof, hidden in the gathering darkness. Only the light of his cigarette gave him away. "There is a ladder, climb up."

Without making him to ask twice, she climbed and finally was able to see him more clearly. She came closer, "Hi."

"Hi. I thought it was Martinez first," He smiled. "Smoke?"

"Thanks," She pulled a cigarette out of a pack that he offered, waiting for him to ignite the lighter. When he lit it up, she sat next to him. "Thea just gave me her car. She's with Juice andâ€¢ uhmâ€¢ Well, she's with Juice. And you? Are you hiding here?"

"I wish," Jax grinned. "I just like this place, don't know why, actually." His facial features, slightly snatched by the light of the lanterns in the distance, despite a light smile was giving away all the fatigue. She was about to ask whether everything was okay, but then she suddenly realized that this question sounded too often these

days. And the answer always wasn't quite honest, so what's the point? Much better would be to distract him from his troubles, whatever they were.

"It's pretty calming," She smiled, making another inhalation. "I bet you come here oftentimes."

"You got me," A quiet laugh. "Guess, I'm seeking for a head clean of thoughts. And yes, I'm seeking for it oftentimes. And how about you, El? How's your head?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what do you think about all of this. Couple of days, but some shit has already happened. Do you regret that you sat on my bike?"

"Kidding? Best decision I've ever made," She was laughing, but it wasn't clear if she was joking. "Actually, I really like being here. And I'd like to stay. Bobby said that, maybe, I could be useful at the garage and at the club."

"Sure!" Genuine enthusiasm sounded in his voice. "We can even make it quite official, like, an assistant or something. Just have to find proper papers, but I'll ask Gemma to do that."

"Oh," Inadvertently left her lips.

"What?"

"I'm afraid she won't be glad about that."

"Right, you already met her?" Jax shook his head with a smirk on his lips. He wasn't surprised at all.

"Aha, today. Seems she don't like me much. That's whyâ€| that's why I left, leaving Abel with her. Sorry," She looked down.

"Don't be, really. It's not about you, it's more about Gemma. She is a wildcat, actually," He chuckled.

"I got that clearly," Ellie let herself to laugh about it a bit, though that meeting still left a bad feeling inside.

"I'll talk to her," Teller moved a little closer, hugging her shoulders covered with goosebumps from the coolness of the night. Or for some other reason, who would know? He said huskily, "Everything will be okay."

And for some reason, on a subconscious level, she believed him. Even though she understood that this words wasn't said just for her calmness, but for his own too.

## 6. Missing things

The next morning life started to run in a wild rhythm. SAMCRO had to ride to Arizona to make sure that future transports will go well and also met Romero who was about to inform them about coke. Jax kept his promise and talked to his mom before the leaving. Despite Gemma

wasn't very fond of this idea she helped Ellie to fill all necessary papers and from now on Ellie Lynn was officially working at Teller-Morrow. She understood that whatever happening between Ellie and Jax is a lot more serious and complicated than she thought. This girl wasn't silly blond-whore for one night's fun, that's for sure, and that's why she continued to consider her as a threat, but yet Gemma had some other shit to figure out so she left her son's new friend or whoever she was for the dessert.

Juice and Thea arrived when everyone were ready. He hugged her tightly before she wished him luck and stepped aside to Ellie, who was quietly asking Jax to take care of himself.

"I bet that warrior princess was on top," said Tig while everyone was doing their last preparations and sat on the bikes.

"Blow me," answered Juice with a sarcastic smile. Everyone laughed and then left one by one while women came out to wave goodbye.

"So, how was everything?" asked Ellie, smiling mischievously. Thea punched her lightly in the shoulder and then smiled a bit shyly.

"Very innocent", she smirked, taking keys back from Ellie. "What about you and VP?" now it was Ellie's turn to blush.

"Quite same".

"Wow. Then let's go and drink to two biggest losers in the whole of creation".

At the time things in Charming were taking their way, SAMCRO met some problems in their other charter but luckily solved them quickly and quietly. Well, almost quietly, but who cares about one little explosion and one club's exposure, anyway. Right after they considered everything with Parada, they were finally on their way home with thirty well made Mexican coke-brick. They were out not for a very long time, but this short term definitely didn't mean that everything froze when they left. Seemed like at the time they were gone, someone decided to make a little mess in some old and almost forgotten things that the club had to deal with. The death of Luan Delaney and the revenge they promised to arrange. Otto too unexpectedly wanted to talk about it again, so there were no doubts that some reasons were behind this aching wound that was disturbed by someone. But after revealed facts, the question about who this 'someone' was passed on the second place. The police, so to say, decided to continue the investigation of Otto's wife's murder in case of new facts that have shown up on a surface, that, as they said, brought them a new suspected. And the club needed to be faster than cops in solving this problem and replacing 'suspected' with that who was really guilty. No surprises that they got only one candidate.

As they got to the porn studio, Jax noticed how totally not enthusiastic was Op about this visit. It wasn't a secret, that seeing the set, even when Lyla wasn't actually taking part in scene, was freaking hard for him, so Teller wanted to finish with all of this just as soon as it was possible. Finding Lyla at the dressing room, they tried to get some information about Georgie Caruso.

"He's not directing anymore, actually," Winston breathed out a cloud

of smoke, calling an immediate reaction from her husband, who took her cigarette and hurried to extinguish it. She almost rolled her eyes, but restrained, continuing, "His new buisness is kinda sex toys stuff, like dolls."

"Dolls?" Tig almost turned pale. It was too weird for him to try to connect sex and dolls, one of his manias and phobias.

"Yeah, like, creepy realistic ones. He offered me to be one of the models, but I have a contract."

"Nice, but how can we find him now?" Jax crossed his arms.

"Well, Dondo is in touch with him, I guess, he can help. Wait for me outside, I'll talk to him."

"Plastic pussies," Treger mumbled to himself, shaking his head, as they all went out, except Opie.

"Are you coming?" Jax turned around to his friend, who looked like shit, to be honest.

"Nah. Better don't see her on a set."

Teller answered nothing, deciding that to leave him alone would be the best thing. Sometimes he thought about what it is for Op to be married on Lyla after his previous merriage that was completely different. It was pretty ironically how situation was reversed this time - now Opie became that one who didn't want to accept some way of life. But that was pretty understandable, though. Despite Jax had warm feelings for Lyla, looking as she was walking before him in her shooting costume that was even hard to call an underwear, he smirked bitterly. If his wife walking around in something like this, it would have ended badly.

"You want to find Georgie?" male voice pulled him out of his thoughts. It was Lyla's director and, in addition, kind of Luan's young padawan, who obviously wasn't quite young. "Why do you need him?..."

"Yeah, we just need to get some things clear," Jax pursed his lips. "He might be involved in Luan's death."

"You think Caruso killed her?" genuine shock sounded in his voice. Teller nodded. "And so what's thenâ€| You gonna wreck him?"

"We don't wreck people, Dondo," Jax grinned.

"Well, that's too bad, cause I'm not gonna help you unless you promise me to smash this duchebag's skull. I want Georgie dead!"

Bobby chuckled, tapping Dondo on the shoulder, "Set it up."

After everything was arranged they hide until Gorgie showed up, in addition, with Ima by his side. A talk began with, surprisingly, her gunfire and his attempt to escape, but Jax didn't let him. He stopped that son of a bitch and Juice gave him a good punch with his foot, so he could understand that running from them was a bad idea.

"Let me have him," yelled Bobby as he ran to Georgie and started to beat a shit out of him.

"Hey! Hey, stop it! Chill out, Bobby!" shouted Jax while Tig and Chibs were dragging Munson away from bleeding Caruso. The conversation apparently wasn't about to be easy.

At the same time Mr. Potter and sheriff Roosevelt had another conversation behind the closed door at the police station. Juice didn't confirm a shipment, but neither denied it, so now it was absolutely clear that SAMCRO and Galinda Cartel are working together. The only problem was that Juice still didn't want to go against his club and his own beliefs, moreover, he was afraid that in the end Roosevelt will leave him on his own with this shit, so he needed assurances. Except only Potter didn't want to give him one without something instead.

"Tell him to bring a sample from the load, a couple of grams. Then he can have a deal," said Potter. Even though Roosevelt had very complicated relationship with SoA, he understood that such thing can easily get Juice killed and he didn't want to cover his hands with someone's blood.

"You do understand that if they catch him, he's a deadman?" But looking at Potter's face it was clear that he didn't give much shit about Juice's destiny.

"That's the point. He has a good reason not to get caught." Sheriff started to regret that he agreed to cooperate with this freaky man, but now he just couldn't walk out. He stuck in this just as deep as Juice. Such an irony.

>He made a call and notified Ortiz about what he need to do and Juice, who lied somehow about problems in his weed-shop, left guys with Georgie, who obviously had a hard time.<p>

Pretty soon Clay appeared and bloody party that seemed to go on a break was about to start over again. Caruso still insisted that he didn't kill Luan, and though even no one believed him, one of his offers and promises rolling in a panic apparently interested Morrow. Relegating the others to the side, he concluded that Georgie might be useful to them.

"Asian sponsors?" Jax raised his eyebrow. "Why the hell do we need them?"

"To bury Charming Heights once and for all," Hale's little dream seemed to be a pain in Clay's ass. "The clocks are ticking for our mayor, he needs a rich patron to finish his plans. And, what a surprise, we got one," he smirked.

"But what about Otto?" Bobby didn't like this at all, and it was obvious. He felt guilty and this guilt was only heating up his anger, so he was the first in line to put a bullet in Caruso's head.

"No one says that Georgie will leave long and happily ever after. After we'll get what we need, we'll deal with him. Otto will understand."

Objections did not followed. Munson volunteered to visit Delaney and inform him about everything, and at this point lovely meeting with

Georgie was almost over. He surely felt an inexpressible relief when he found out that his Asian partners, so to say, saved his life. What couldn't be said about Dondo, who was disappointed because of this turn of events.

But this turn wasn't the worst one. Roosevelt arranged a meeting at the police station, and when Juice showed up, he couldn't find a better place to talk than a cell. When he voiced his demands, Ortiz was shocked.

"Are you outta your mind?" He stared at sheriff in disbelief. "How would I even do that?"

"That's not my problem, actually," Eli clicked his tongue. "But I'm sure you'll figure it out. Because if you won't, of if you'll refuseâ€| Wait a minute," He willfully frowned. "I don't think that you can refuse. If you want your club to be mostly safe from all the shit that is coming, bring a sample."

The thing was that Roosevelt was quite right. He had no choice; at least, he believed that in that moment. When Eli opened the door, Juice walked out scared and pissed off at the same time. He had no idea how to figure that shit out, he needed to share with someone about this pressure Roosevelt put on him but there was no way to do that. So all he has left is to ride to the storage and take that bloody sample somehow.

And while Juice was mentally tortured, Ellie just finished her shift at Teller-Morrow. She barely saw Gemma today but even those few minutes were quite enough for spoiled mood. She knew this cold war couldn't last forever but if it was up to Ellie she would prefer to end it as soon as possible. She hated situations like that so she decided to talk to Gemma when the right moment would come, but for better or worse crazy old lady decided to take a break for these days. And the rest of SAMCRO guys were about to take a break too.

As they finished their little chat with Georgie everyone went back to the club-house. At the end of the day the anxiety about tomorrow grew stronger and each of them could feel it. Knowing that out there are lying thirty kilograms of Mexican coke not really helped to relax. However, they needed to calm their thoughts, drink some beer and take a sleep and at least with one thing Ellie was about to help them.

"Thanks, sweetheart," said Chibs and everyone else as she gave them a bottle of cold beer. She smiled and then came to Jax, who was smoking nearby.

"Was everything okay today?" she asked, giving him bottle too and sitting down next to him. He put his hand on her shoulder, making her move closer.

"No wounds or kidnapping, if you're about that," he said, smiling. She nodded and leaned closer to him, resting her head on his shoulder. "What about you?"

"No mamma's possession, if you're about that," she smirked. "I'm glad to be here, actually."

"Guess I deserved some reward for your rescue, huh?" grinned Jax,

making Ellie blush immediately. Fortunately or not, but Thea saved her from further answer with her appearance.

"Hey, Zena, we missed you," said Tig from his corner. Thea decided not to ask about this nickname though she wasn't very against it. More like she wasn't against at all, feeling herself more like home here with every minute, which she never felt back in Tacoma.

"I was looking for Juice. He didn't pick up his phone, so I thought maybe he's here," she said a bit nervously. As it turned out, a mysterious car didn't disappear anywhere. Today Thea noticed it again, this time not too far from her job and that scared the shit out of her. She came here without knowing what she's about to tell Juice, but she was afraid to come home alone.

"He's got problems in his weed-shop. Guess his still solves the problem with smokers or something", said Chibs, saluting her with bottle.

"A weed-shop?" she asked, raising her eyebrow.

"You just wait until he starts to tell you about his magical green tea, darlin'," yelled Tig from the other side of the room and then started to parody Juice's manner of speech.

"Can't wait to hear it," she mumbled to herself and threw her bag on the table.

"Is something wrong?" Jax frowned a bit, feeling that the question was even unnecessary. Thea doubted for a few seconds, but then decided that she doesn't have many options and trying to look super strong and independent in this situation would be foolish.

"Can we talk?" Finally, she asked quietly, noticing how Ellie, who heard it, turned away. An amazing ability to resist curiosity and separate everything on her business and not her business. Sometimes Thea wished to have such feature of character, it might have saved her from so many troubles, but the saddest part was that Lynn learned it from thousands of mistakes, and this ability was just a product of experience: do not put your nose into someone else's business and you might be safe. And she didn't think that Thea's problems were something she could climb into. So she just smiled lightly even before Jax answered, and after slightly squeezing his arm, she went to the side.

"Of course," said Teller, looking away from Ellie and nodding in the direction of the entering door. It was quiet outside and the night darkness already began to fall. When they approached the tables near the club, he took out a pack of cigarettes and offered her one just out of politeness, 'cause he seemed to remember that Martinez didn't smoke. But surprisingly she nodded. Lighting up her cigarette, Jax decided to start, "So, what is it?"

"Remember asking me what brought me here?" Thea wasn't looking him in the eyes, watching the smoke dissolving instead. "It just came up to my mind when I needed to run. And I needed to do it because I screwed up." She made another inhalation. "Those guys, connected with Five Families, who you hid Juice from, they're stillâ€‘ let's say, on top. Nothing has changed much after all these years and I kinda followed Juice's steps in crossing their road. I had to lose one case, just

one fucking case, and somehow I didn't. I don't even know how that happened, like, literally, it was pure luck. Or unluck, if looking from the other side. All I could do was a runaway, so that's what I didâ€|" She broke, finally looking at Jax.

"Let me guess," Standing near her, now he sat by her side. "It didn't help?"

Martinez shook her head, "Nah, in the end it didn't. I was pretty careful during the past year, but just before you guys got outta Stockton everything turned bad. And I'm totally sure that these assholes are enough vindictive to hunt me even after a year."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I've told Juice. It was, you know, kind of our problem. He told me that we'll handle this shitâ€|"

"For God's sake, Thea, it's Juice," Jax sighed. "He's my brother and I love him just as much as you do, but let's be honest, he is not the one to solve shitty problem without putting himself in much worse situation."

"Yeah," She grinned sadly. "You're probably right."

"Anyway, what's now? They showed up?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe," Thea rubbed her forehead, feeling as her head began to ache. "There is a car, black Audi that seems to follow me. And there are only two explanations: either it's them or I became a paranoid."

"Shit," Jackson finished his cigarette. It felt like Universe decided to laugh at him, tossing more problems with every single minute. He remembered the day when he first met Juice and Thea. That dread in their eyes, dread of two young stupid dudes who got themselves in something they were not ready to face. And now it felt like damn Deja Vu. "You two definitely deserve each other," he grinned sadly.

"Listen, Jax. I know that you guys now have bigger problems and I don't wanna cause any more, soâ€|" but he didn't let her finish. Jax put his hand on her shoulder, smiling encouragingly.

"Hey! Family goes first, Martinez," he said and Thea nodded, smirking. There were no words to explain how grateful she was at this very moment. Sometimes she thought that if only her own charter even slightly were like Redwood Original, then, maybe, her whole life could turn differently. She thanked him and then was about to call Ellie and go home, but Jax stopped her. "And you better tell him yourself, T. Like you said, your kind of problem," she sighed, shaking her head and got back to the clubhouse.

"Everything's fine, sweetheart?" Ellie asked as Thea appeared. She looked tired and still nervous, but yet she smiled and answered kindly:

"Hope it will be. You're coming? Guess that Ortiz won't show up tonight."

"Yeah, sure. I'll catch you up, just need to do one thing," Thea smirked knowingly and went to her car while Ellie quickly finished with the bar and came to Jax, who returned after his conversation with Martinez.

"Leaving?" Ellie nodded, not realizing very clearly what she was about to do. "Okay, then see you tomorrow, babe."

"See you tomorrow," she said and then leaned a little closer to him. "And I promise to think about your reward," she whispered in his ear and kissed him on the cheek.

"Have you lost your grip, aye, Jackie-boy?" smirked Chibs, putting his hand on his shoulder.

"I'm a fan of challenges".

On their way home Thea teased Ellie a little bit, but she didn't remain in debt and teased her with Juice. They laughed loudly and soon Thea almost forgot about today's shit. Almost. When they got back, she locked herself in the bedroom and called Juice.

"Hey, it's me. We need to talk, Juice, so, eh, call me back when you can, please, it's kind of important," she turned off her phone and lay down on her bed with eyes closed.

But Juice definitely wasn't about to call anyone back. By the time Thea have been looking for him, he got to the storage, feeling as his heartbeat quickened with every minute. It was easy to pretend that he wanted to check if everything was okay in front of Fil, who couldn't even think of any other reason for him to come. Couldn't suspect any lies, 'cause it was Juice. That made Ortiz feel even worse, but he tried to throw everything away, convincing himself that he has to do it. That's what was pulsing in his brainpan when he opened one of the boxes with exactly lying coke briquettes.

"I have to do that," He whispered to himself, taking out one of the briquettes and pulling a knife to open it just for couple of grammes. But he couldn't, 'cause he heard how Fil was calling him and few seconds later he pulled the door handle. Ortiz hurried to hide the whole briquette behind his belt, "Shit."

"Is everything okay?" Immediately asked Fil as he opened the door.

"Yeah. Why not on duty?"

"Kinda lonely, I guess," He shrugged.

"I'll be right out," promised Juice when the other guy, from Mayans, showed up.

"Hey! Watcha doing?"

"Just checking on my guys," He turned off the lights in a room with boxes, feeling as briquette literally was tending him to the ground. With a furious clatter of the pulse in his temples, he locked the door, "It's all good. See you in the morning."

Walking out of storage, he was silently cursing himself for what he

just did. Moreover, he was cursing himself for what it might bring to the club. The perspective of finding the missing briquette in the morning was scared as hell, so he decided to wait and get it back in place before the rest of the club members come with Mayans. Sitting under a tree in a grove near the storage, he didn't notice how he fell asleep.

The sound of motorcycle engines was definitely not the best alarm clock. With a slight panic attack, Juice realised that he missed his opportunity to fix everything. Approaching the storage, he saw some Mayans talking near it, so his only option was to hide the briquette somewhere in a grove for some time, praying that he would have another chance to return the lost item before it'll be too late.

And while Ortiz was overwhelmed with shit that he brought on himself, the other's morning started not much better. When Jax showed up at the club. From one of the prospects he found out that Opie spent the night there and it couldn't be a good sign.

"Hey," after a knock on a door and a permission to enter, said Teller. "Whatcha doin' here?"

"Rough night," answered Op, lacing his shoes and avoiding his friend's gaze. Before Jax could clarify what exactly made his night so, the door to the bathroom opened and he saw no one else, but Ima.

"Wow," She said with a smile. "Morning."

"Really rough," Teller's voice immediately turned metallic. Looking as Opie was still trying not to look at him and blondie whore already petting him from his back, she concluded, overstepping himself, "I guess I'll leave you two then."

When he left, all Ima got in respond to her attempts to continue their night was an unequivocal advice to go, after which Op went out.

He was frustrated, almost feeling this aching void inside him which he tried to fulfill or at least to make less noticeable. But it was stupid to think that one whore can make him feel better, only worse. Opie hated himself for what he's done, he hated Ima, hated Lyla, hated those who took Donna away from him. God, he was so tired from all of this shit, but most of it were only about to come.

"Did you lost your mind? You've got a family, man, a new wife!" The last thing Op needed right now was moral teaching from anybody, including his best friend. He knew he screwed up even without him.

"I found birth-control pills! All this time I was trying to have kids Lyla was just killing it off!" Jax sighed heavily, feeling sorry for his mate.

"And you thought that fucking that bitch will solve your problems?"

"Well, that helped you," and that was painful, but straight to the point. Jax smirked sadly, remembering that period of his life. He thought that the goal justifies the means and back then his goal was

to save Tara in his twisted strange way. But very soon he realized that it was very, like completely idiotic idea.

"So what's going on, man?" Op closed his eyes for a moment. This is it, this is the moment when he was able to see the truth and accept it.

"I don't know, Jax. I tried so hard but I'm afraid that there were no feelings and I justâ€œ I miss Donna," He concluded almost with irritation and then quickly left, leaving Jax alone for a while. He wanted to help his best friend so much but he knew better than someone else that sometimes there are things that just cannot be fixed. The only way to continue to live is to move on, to let go everything, left it in the past and apparently Op was not ready to let Donna go. But who could blame him for that? Anyway, the clocks were ticking and it was time to go and check up on bloody coke.

When they got to the storage, the surprise was awaiting for them. The fact that one briquette was gone immediately started to heat up the atmosphere. Juice didn't deny that he came here to check up on his guys right after he finished his problems at his shop. He acted quite convincing, considering that deep inside he was scared shitless, but Alvarez was pretty unsure about his non-involvement.

"Yeah, I just put a briquette into my pants and then walked out, duchebag," Said he, hiding his nervousness behind almost mocking tone, that obviously pissed Alvarez off. The fight almost began, but Clay quickly stopped it with a few gunshots. Scuffle obviously won't help them to bring the coke back before Romero arrives, so he urged everyone to calm down and think straight. It was clear as day that no one from the outside couldn't do that, so it was either a Son or Mayan.

"It doesn't matter who did that, the scum will die," Said Alvarez before he left. Clay and Jax concluded that no one else could do that except prospects. Jax, Chibs, Happy, and Juice stayed to find out the truth, but Tig and Bobby hastened to the clubhouse, where Gemma was waiting for them and especially Op. And everyone knew that it is better not to keep her waiting, especially when she is irritated. And that's what she was like today.

When Thea and Ellie came to the club. Gemma was already there. She brought Abel with her, but had to leave him with Piney as well as she faced two surprises this morning, both of them were female. First was Dawn, slightly crazy girl who's last name was Trager and it was kinda saying for itself. She called Tig to tell him this wonderful news about the arrival of one of his daughters and when she thought that her problems are solved, she saw Ima. The face of this bitch created only one wish, to punch it, so she hurried to walk out of the club, where Ellie and Thea just parked. Using the moment, Ellie quickly left Martinez, hiding behind a plenty of work to do at the clubhouse, but frankly speaking, Gemma had more important woes than mess with her right now. When Thea was about to leave, the worst part began. Lyla came with very expected desire to find Opie, so Gemma stopped Martinez and took her by the hand to come to talk to Lyla with her.

"Hey, Gem, didn't you see Op? He wasn't at home last night," before answering, she sent Thea quite meaningful look and said, smiling very convincing:

"Oh, nothing to worry about. I think they just had the late oneâ€|" She looked at Thea again, like if she was mentally ordering to support her.

"Yeah, right!.. Eh, Juice didn't come home too, said they were too busy. I guess, they all just crashed up here," Gemma nodded. Everything could have been quite cool, 'cause Lyla almost believed them, but then she noticed Ima's car and suddenly everything became very clear to her. She rushed to the clubhouse with unconcealed anger, ignoring Gemma and Thea, who hurried after her.

"You!" Unfortunately for Ima, she was just coming out of a dorm and Lyla caught her. "What are you doing here?"

"Nobody says 'good morning' anymore?" Seemed like she wasn't embarrassed not even for a bit.

"You spent the night?.." Lyla's voice gave away her attempts to hold back tears.

"You don't wanna know, sweetie."

"You, vileâ€| slut," She hissed, making a step forward.

"Look, I didn't force him. Married pussy is a boring pussy," And her last words might have been a huge mistake, 'cause Lyla rushed to her with an intention to at least break her nose again, but surprisingly this time Ima was prepared. In the blink of an eye, she took out a gun from her purse, making Lyla recoil. She heard as Tig, who just walked in with Bobby, shouted something, but ignored it and aimed the gun at Winston, "I will blow a hole straight through that pretty face of yours!"

Ellie was standing behind the bar all that time, glancing from time to time on Abel, who was playing with a constructor at one of the tables near Piney. But when Ima pulled out her handgun, she went out and made a couple of steps towards Teller jr. It was kinda instinct, and when that crazy bitch turned with the loaded gun, she twitched.

"Why him?" asked Lyla, almost ignoring aimed arms.

"You're asking me?" Ima smirked. "You better ask that cock that was inside of me last night."

Obviously, it was the last straw. No longer able to contain herself, Lyla left in tears and Ima started to move back to the door, not putting down her saving ticket.

"Put that fucking thing down, the kid is here!" It was Ellie, who finally couldn't stand it anymore. She approached her a bit, looking decidedly despite the fact that now she was under the gun, "But better don't hide this thirty-eight too far, you might need it."

"Get out, get out," Tig said almost with his lips, pointing on the door. When she crossed the doorstep, he turned around to Ellie, "Are you okay?" She just nodded, looking back at Abel, when female voice sounded:

"Dad!" Dawn Trager almost jumped in Tig's arms, hugging him tightly.

"Baby!" He shouted, putting her up. "It's so nice to see you. so nice."

>Gemma, who was silently watching it all for the past time, smirked and finally moved from her place, going across the room to her grandson, who was sitting now on Piney's lap.<p>

"How are you here, honey?"

"Okay," The boy answered, looking a bit lost, though. "Who was that? Was her gun real?"

Gemma unvoluntary looked back, at Ellie, who approached them. She didn't want to admit it so badly, but she was impressed with her determination and will to protect Abel. She wasn't afraid at all, or at least, she didn't show that. She was ready to protect him like if he was her own child, and Gemma always respected that kind of strength in people. So maybe, just maybe, that could be the beginning of the process of acceptance. Who knows? Deep inside Gemma was sure that Ellie, if that day she was in Tara's place, would probably try to stop that Irish son of a bitch from taking Abel away. It was the evidence of absolute consuming love and loyalty to family and those who she loves. Maybe she wasn't that bad, after all?

"No, baby, that silly girl just wanted to boast her toy, that's all. Here, play with Ellie for a while, granny need to make a call," she gave Abel to confused Lynn with the face vaguely similar to smiling. "I'll be right back," she said and then walked out, ready to beat the shit out of someone.

"Okay, now I definitely should go unless you wanna to proceed against that whore. If Ortiz will come, tell him that I will kick his Puerto Rican ass if he won't call me back. Oh, and sweetie, that was very heroic," Thea smirked, giving Ellie a quick hug and then left, hoping that damn black car won't appear today.

When Gemma finally reached to Op, who immediately understood that everything is totally bad, guys at the storage were just in the process of clearing everything up. As well as simple threatening didn't work, the next step kinda moral torture.

"This is the question of devotion, the loyalty to the club," said Jax, putting one gun on the table between two prospects, Fil and Rat. "If you get through this, we will know that you have nothing to do with what happened."

"And you can't refuse," Opie added. "It would mean that we were mistaken in you, then you're those who robbed us."

"Is there really bullets in there?" Fil's voice slightly trembled.

"One bullet. You have to pull the trigger once."

"That's the best chance you have,"

Jax scrolled the cylinder, handing the gun to Fil. A couple of

seconds filled with hardened breath and quiet cursing, and then a click of a trigger. Fil's prayers were heard and he breathed out. Then it was Rat's turn. One more scrolling of the cylinder and Jackson put a handgun in front of him.

"Your turn," He said, looking at him carefully.

"There can't be a ball cartridge, 'cause then if it shoots, it would be murder," Rat definitely wasn't about to accept his part so bravely.

"What's the point?"

"Jesus Christ, are you really going toâ€|"

"Are you in or out?!" Teller almost shouted. And it worked. Without any other words, Rat hurried to take the gun and with a shout of despair he pulled the trigger, ending up in the similar relief, just as Fil. And right in that moment, Opie showed up again after a short, but meaningful conversation with Gemma.

"We got a problem," He said to Jax, waiting for him to nod.

"Yeah," He responded, and thought that they have a lot of them, actually, but it didn't had voice. Eventually, when was the last time they didn't have them?

## 7. Some shots sounds loud

It seemed that not only SAMCRO had problems today. While Jax with others tried to beat out the truth from prospects, Tig was deftly manipulated by his own daughter.

"Faun's gonna do a serious damage to herself if we won't do something, daddy," And with every next word she sounded more upset because of her baby sister, starting to cry in the end just to finish her well-planned performance. Bobby, who was sitting behind all this time, shook his head, perfectly understanding that every single word was a lie, but Tig was too overwhelmed with his love and concern about his kids to understand that this show was just about the money. At least, that was what Bobby thought, but Trager wasn't stupid, he understood that as well, it's just sometimes we're ready to do almost everything if kids will ask us in a proper way.

The same time Opie, Jax, Clay, and Miles finally arrived at the clubhouse. And while Gemma was talking Op off with some morality shit, Piney decided to do it his way by using a fist.

"Your dick almost got people killed," Nobody saw that coming, and after a moment of silence Piney added before leaving, "I don't even know who are you anymore." And the truth was that Op didn't know either.

"Put an ice on it," Said Ellie as she finished to treat his wound. It wasn't the first time for her when she had to deal with injuries, so she volunteered to help. Opie thanked her and went to the kitchen, where Jax followed him, sharing a smoke as he came in. He saw his friend was a hell tired of this shit and had no idea how to figure everything out. Teller smirked to himself, remembering that he and

Tara went through the same, but it wasn't a good kind of fixing anything that he would ever recommend to his pal.

"I guess I just wanted her to change her way of living," said Op, giving the rolled cigarette back to Jax.

"Maybe she doesn't want to change it," And here again Winston thought that it was all about his wishes, not hers. But yet how can anyone accept this kind of way to earn money? Opie was sure that it's better to stay poor than to choose this path. The thing was that it was exactly what Donna thought about him and the club. He shook his head, chasing away the memories about a deceased wife, knowing that now the question was about the present one.

Lyla waited for him outside, on the roof. She was crying, being absolutely mentally broken. Op couldn't look at her, so he just sat by her side, looking somewhere away.

"Why?" She finally asked.

"I found birth-control pills in your dress-room," He pursed his lips, making a pause. "Look, I know you don't want another kid!"

"I had an abortion," Lyla suddenly interrupted him. Opie turned and looked furiously at her.

"Mine?" She nodded, sobbing and didn't look at him. He clenched his fists so his knuckles turned white. Despite the anger that covered him. it seemed like he couldn't completely understand everything. He stood up, uttering through the lump in the throat, "I'll tell Mary to take the kids and stay at the clubhouse. And then you tell me what you wanna do."

And as Opie tried to realize what his wife just confessed him about, Miles just finished his task and came to Pres.

"Hey, Clay! I've got a footage on a warehouse. I checked the cameras, no one but our guys came in or out, it's all quiet," He said to Morrow with a USB in his hand.

"Alright then, you ride there and give it back to Oswald's guy."

Meanwhile, at the warehouse, no one was quite satisfied with the results. No one, but Juice. He wasn't excited not just about results, but about all the shit that was going on, feeling as the responsibility for other's sufferings weighs on him. He literally couldn't stay in one place, watching innocent prospects paying for what he did, and when the extreme measure was taken, he understood that he must fix everything, no matter what. Tense was growing stronger with every minute of silence behind the door, where Fil and Rat were supposed to figure out by themselves who must die for betrayal no one of them made, so when Chibs was about to come in, to either hurry them or shoot both, Ortiz frantically protested.

"Look, Romeo will be here in an hour, one of them must be felled," Said Telford.

"You're serious? We already scared the shit out of them with this roulette!"

"This is the only way to calm down the Cartel, we need a body of that rat who's responsible for it, or there will be blood anyway. I have no options, Juice."

"Wait, wait!" He blocked his way to the room. "What if Alvarez is playing with us? How are we sure it wasn't his guy?"

"Juicy, it's not for you to decide," Seemed like it all started to irritate Chibs. He made one more step but met Ortiz's resistance again.

"Hey! We have to give them last chance," And before his older friend could protest, he rushed to the room. Rat and Fil stood up immediately, looking at him almost with a hope. Making one deep breath, Juice decided to push a speech that would sound persuasively, "Look, here goes a man. He expects to see the whole coke in its place. This briquette is not just about you, but about the whole club. And I'm giving you the last chance," And the last chance for him, he thought. "We'll step outside, have a smoke. And whoever took the briquette, we know it's somewhere near, so just bring it back. No questions. No consequences," He looked back at Chibs and Happy, and the last one was obviously not delighted with this, but Telford stopped him from assault and battery.

"Fifteen minutes," Said Chibs before leaving. Outside the room he turned to Juice, looking pretty displeased, "Even if briquette appears, these two are out."

"At least they will be alive, and we will get back coke," He shrugged.

Chibs shook his head, telling Happy to go and watch their bikes to not let them to run off. Juice said that he need to pee and advised him to go and have a smoke, to give them their promised fifteen minutes. When he finally was left alone, he hurried to the grove where he hid that fucking briquette that caused too many troubles. Finding the place where he hid it was the easiest part, much more difficult was to get back to the storage and not attracting the attention.

"Hey!" He recognized Miles's voice even before he turned around and saw him climb over the wire fence.

"Hey," He threw in embarrassment, not able to check if his hoody is covering the coke. "What are you doing here?"

"Taking a short cut. You?.." And before he said anything, Juice understood, that he noticed. He slowly looked down, seeing as briquette behind his belt is showing up. His heart skipped a beat. Miles frowned, "Jesus, Juice. It was you?"

"Look," He reached for the briquette, but Miles reacted fast and took out his gun. "Wow! Easy, I'm unarmed, okay?" He slowly pulled out the coke.

"Shit, Juice."

"Let me explainâ€| "

"Yeah. Back at the warehouse," He didn't take Ortiz from sight.  
"Let's go."

"Okay," Juice nodded as if he had no other choice, but couple of seconds gave him the realization that he has another option, though it was something he didn't think he would ever be capable to do. In the blink of an eye, he threw the briquette to Miles, making him recoil and go off, bringing Juice a wave of burning pain in the leg when a piece of lead dug into it. They both fell on the ground and it was just a matter of speed, except Miles decided to use Juice's wound and hit it couple of times, making him yelling from pain that seemed to overshadow all other feelings, including fear, so when he reached the gun that was lying nearly on the ground, he just hurried to make a couple of shots at once, shouting and feeling the splashes of fresh hot blood on his face. When Miles fell down, few moments he was just staring into the distance, breathing heavily and being unable to understand everything. He woke up from this delusion only when he heard distant voices that made him overcome the terrible pain and crawl away, looking for briquette to put it in Miles's pocket. It was too fucking wrong, too hellishly to try to think about it now, so he was acting mostly instinctively.

When Chibs and Happy, who heard the gunshots, ran closer, he looked at them in total confusion, and it was not just a game to the public.

"What the hell?!" Lowman goggled.

"Oh, shit," Chibs approached Juice and helped him to get up. Ortiz tried to explain that he saw Miles rummaging in the bushes.

"Then he saw me and twitched, tried to kill me," He shook his head while Chibs put out the briquette from under Miles's cut. "Still, one bullet I caught."

"Holly shit," Telford shuddered when Happy decided that their rat didn't had enough and put a few bullets more in his chest.

"Lying bitch," He croaked.

They were dragging Juice back to the warehouse when Jax, Clay, and Opie just parked their bikes.

"Shit, the hell happened?" Teller quickly approached them to help.

They sat Ortiz and Chibs explained what was going on, handing him the briquette. No one could quite believe that it was Miles.

"You should be shot for taking him in," Said Clay and then tapped lightly Juice's shoulder. "Well done."

"Yeah," Hissed Juice through gritted teeth in pain.

It was exactly what Jax was afraid of. Brother against brother because of some fucking briquette of mexican coke. He looked at Clay furiously, wondering if all of what just happened really worth that money and risk, but yet he said nothing, knowing perfectly that it won't change anything, only make things worse. This time, they were lucky, but what about the next day, or week. or month? Will they be

lucky enough to prevent another death of somebody who's actually one of them or there's gonna be only more and more dead bodies? Jax didn't want to find out. Because, yes, Miles's betrayal was a big miss, but he was a novice and so Jax didn't feel very sorry for this lost. But what if one day there's gonna be someone else in his place? Op, Chibs, Bobby? What if he found them dead one day because of that bloody Cartel? "Fuck," he thought while putting the last briquette back in its place.

"Bury the rat deep and leave no mark," said Clay and Happy nodded with some kind of maniacal anticipation. Then he went to the warehouse as well as Romeo was about to show up any minute now.

"Get him in the van," commanded Chibs to prospects and they quickly and very carefully took Juice and helped him to get inside. "Keep an eye on him until I'll get back."

At the warehouse, where Alvarez and Romero just came to check up on his goods, Telford recounted all the briquettes and Parada was happy to hear that all thirty kilos were intact. When he and Clay walked out to discuss some details about next shipment, Alvarez came to Jax and asked him with uncovered pleasure in his voice:

"Looks like your ranks have thinned?" but Jax answered with metal cold, looking mayan straight in the eyes.

"No, we're good. Won't happen again," Alvarez nodded and continued to control his people while they were shipping the boxes. With those last words, the incident was over and everyone could finally get out of this place and ride home to have some rest. Almost everyone. As Chibs came to the truck, he gave the address and ordered them to bring Juice there.

"Hey, man, just take me to the club, there's no need to go there," Juice didn't want to come to Thea in this condition so he tried to refuse immediately. But Chibs just put on his helmet and said:

"Gladly, Juicy-boy, but since we have no doctor anymore, I'm gonna need a pair of skilled hands to help me to take this bullet out of your leg. 'Cause, you know, if I ask Tig to help me there's a huge possibility that this is the last day you actually have one," He smirked and told prospects to ride. "And don't forget to come here after we finish and take his bike," They nodded and started the engine.

At the same time Thea and Ellie, who came back from clubhouse not so long ago, were sitting in the living room, drinking beer and sharing stories. Both surprisingly turned to the door when they heard a demanding knock. Thea shrugged her shoulders and got up to open it.

"Chibs, what are youâ€|" And then she saw Fil and Rat, holding Juice, whose face was covered in blood. "Jesus Christ," she mumbled, turning pale immediately.

"Sorry to interrupt you, lass, but we need to stitch him up," Thea could only look at Juice and recovered only when Chibs put his arm on her shoulder.

"Yeahâ€| yeah, come in," she said, letting them inside by stepping back, feeling how her knees were trembling. "What can I do?..."

"Not youâ€| aye, Ellie!" He noticed Lynn, who just walked out of the room to the sound of voices and froze when she saw them. "You told you had an experience of stitching up? I need your help."

"God, I'veâ€| She broke, breathing out after a second, "Sure. C'mon, drag him to the kitchen."

"Thanks," Telford waved to the prospects and they passed to the room. Thea still stood without any movement, just her eyes were following Ortiz. Before going after the guys, Ellie dropped:

"Breath out, everything will be okay."

And she wanted to believe it so badly because only such promise could calm a little tremor of hands that gripped them when Chibs ripped the bloody trouser-leg. By the corner of her eye, Ellie noticed that Martinez finally appeared at the doorway, but she definitely wasn't able to do anything, so when Telford said that they need to wash the wound, El had to bring a first aid kit by herself.

"What happened?" She dared to ask while helping Chibs to wash away the blood.

"You really wanna know, lass?" He gave her to understand that the question was rhetorical and explanations won't follow. Anyway, the conversation didn't work out because of Juice's quiet moans that he tried his best to restrain, but couldn't help himself when Ellie got too close to the wound.

"Sorry," She whispered as Chibs were looking for forceps to remove bullet residues. "Have patience, I'm afraid we don't have a sufficiently strong painkiller."

Ortiz just nodded, closing his eyes either because of pain, or because he didn't want to meet Thea's eyes. She was quietly cursing everything, feeling as the shiver begins to penetrate to the bone. She couldn't stand the fact that she couldn't help him, not realizing that in her condition even if there was something she needed to do, she probably would fail. Watching him laying right on the table, painted everywhere with the color of pain, red, was too hard, but she wasn't able to look away.

"Jesus," Slipped from her lips again. "Fuck," And then again and again, until Ellie had enough.

"Stop it, Thea, you're not helping!" Lynn looked back at her for a moment, just to sound more convincingly. "Calm down or go out."

Obviously, she didn't go anywhere. She just clenched her fists, trying to overstep the rising panic inside while Chibs was quietly instructing Ellie how to sew up the maim as well as his eyesight could let him down.

"I've stitched up only cut eyebrow," Saying that she was nervous was like saying nothing. Chibs was right, she faced with the need to proceed and heal the wounds, 'cause her precious daddy was a magnet

for problems, and his face - for fists. But he had never caught a bullet.

"Principle is not much different. C'mon, lass."

And while Ellie was getting more and more involved in club's mess, listening to Juice's hardened breath and being scared as hell to do something wrong, Jax was fixing some problem too. After a pretty rough conversation with Gemma, he saw only one way outta that shit that happened in the morning and only one way to prevent a recurrence. The funniest thing was that he didn't even has to explain anything, Ima fantasized lie of the land by herself.

"Are you jealous?" She stretched her lips into a satisfied smile. "I am only yours bad girl, huh?"

"Yeah," Jax grinned, approaching her a bit. "That's right."

Ima naively leaned closer to him, giving an impatient kiss before leading him to her dressing room to continue. Her smile promised a lot, moreover in a complex with removed blouse. And there was one step between Jax and undeniable pleasure, and one step between Ima and her meeting with the dressing table. When she fell down with a bloody face cause of nose broken once again, Jax hurried to bend over her and squeeze her neck.

"You come close to my club again, or to my family, and I will fucking kill you," He almost hissed. "You got me?" Feeling as he batters from pent anger, he decided that it'd be better to do a mickey now. But before he did, he couldn't resist a desire and split, "Whore."

When he was leaving, he heard as she started to whine. It didn't cause him either to pity, nor remorse, 'cause that was exactly what she deserved. Not because of her way of life, not even because she didn't think to whom she spreads her legs, but because thinking that you can aim the gun on someone inside the club and leave without consequences was the top of idiocy. This little performance calmed him a bit, so on his way home he decided to ride a bit longer and don't go back too soon. He needed to clear his head and what can help better than a roaring wind and a sound of Harley's engine? Jax didn't watch where he was riding, though he didn't care much, the night covered all signs and he gave himself to the road without a doubt. The road has never ever failed him before and never will.

He was driving long enough to convince himself that what happened today was his fault. Not entirely, of course, but he was involved just as much as Juice and Miles were. If only he didn't listen to Clay and said 'nay' to all of this drug-shit. He was wondering if there's a chance, a little possibility to make a deal with Cartel, find someone else who will be ready to take their place and so SAMCRO will just forget about this nightmare like it never happened. Maybe. Somehow he was sure that they can make it the right way if only Clay let them. When he came home and opened the door to Abel's room, he stood silently without a movement for a couple of minutes. Yes, he needed to convince Clay, he needed to make him understand how wrong this cooperation might be, or, better to say, already was. He needed to do that for his son and for his club. Jax carefully laid down behind Abel and moved closer, wrapping his hand around his tiny little body.

And as he was listening to his son's calm breath, he got back to what Gemma said him today before he went to Ima. She said about Ellie, about how protective she immediately became when she smelled a threat. It was hard, like, fucking hard to receive a gratitude from his mom and today Ellie did that without even trying. "Tara would probably do the same for him", Jax thought and then cut himself instantly. Here he back again to his point of no return. This wasn't the first time when he compared Ellie and Tara and no matter how hard he tried to believe that he was over Tara, acting like this is probably not the best way to move on. He hated to miss her, hated to not be able to pass this period of his life, but yet it wasn't that easy as he thought before.

At the same time, when Jax fell asleep to his thoughts and Abel's breath, Tig called a taxi for his daughter and waved her goodbye until the car disappeared. When he came back to Gemma and Bobby, who stood not far away from him, they were shaking their heads disapprovingly.

"You gave her the money?" Asked Bobby, despite he already knew the answer.

"Oh, yeah. Of course," said Tig, continuing to look at the place where she was a moment ago.

"She will be back for more," smirked Gemma. Tig nodded, smiling, and went back to the clubhouse. Who could blame him for being a father, after all?

And while Gemma and Bobby went after him, both laughing a bit, Chibs and Ellie already have finished with their saving mission. Ellie bandaged Juice's leg and now prospects could carry him to the bedroom, as well as Thea didn't even want to hear about driving him to the club or his own home. Chibs wasn't about to argue at all, 'cause he worried about Ortiz and thought it'd be good if someone will keep an eye on him.

"I'll come in the morning," He promised, nodding to Thea and squeezing Ellie's shoulder, "Good job, honey." She just smiled back, trowing away bloody gloves and not being able to answer something meaningful enough. When he left, she stood in the kitchen a little bit more, eyes closed, thinking if what just happened was a usual thing to this club. The question was rhetorical; she already knew what the answer was, and it was not that scary, but hard. She couldn't imagine herself on Thea's place, couldn't understand completely how was it: to see someone you care about so much in pain, not being able to do anything about it. She felt a heavy load on her chest, which prevented breath. For the first time, she seriously wondered what she was getting in to. What she was getting used to. She was pulled out of her thought by Thea, who popped into the kitchen after making sure that Juice is conveniently in the bedroom.

"Is he okay?" Ellie asked, slightly leaning forward.

"Yeah, mostly," Thea, who calmed down noticeably, sighed. "Just not talking much."

"You try to be talkative after a caught bullet," Lynn smirked grimly and wearily. "Give him time," She ran her hand over Thea's shoulder

before going into the living room, but Martinez stopped her.

"Ellie," A short pause was full of attempts to find the words, but in the end, she simply said, "Thank you."

"It was the least I could do, being useful," She smiled lightly.  
"Good night, sweetheart."

"Night," Thea breathed out when she already left. After a couple of seconds spent in some kind of stupor, she hurried back to the bedroom, where Juice was lying on her bed, taking up almost all the space. However, it didn't bother her at all, 'cause she had strong doubts that she would sleep this night even if she had a place for it. She just sat on the edge of the bed, looking directly at Ortiz and feeling awful because he still didn't look back. "As I understand, you're not about to tell me anything, aren't you?"

It took a whole minute for him to finally turn to her. He couldn't explain it, but with her presence, he felt even worse. He felt as guilt is strangling him under her gaze, so he spoke with difficulty, "There's nothing much to tell."

"You're brought here, covered in blood, patched right on the kitchen table by amateur and you have nothing to tell, really?" After jitters, Thea definitely was easy to put out of temper, so it cost her a lot to restrain self somehow. "Ortizâ€œ!" She rubbed her tired eyes with hands. "To hell with you. Keep your silence. But we have to clean the rest of the blood from your face."

While she was in the bathroom, filling a bowl with clean water and looking for a towel, he laid motionless, looking up at the ceiling. Weird, heavy vacuum reigned inside his brainpan and even the fact that Thea, his Thea was near didn't scatter the lifeless void.

"Here we go," She appeared in front of him, kneeling and wetting the towel in the water. Carefully, she started to wash away the dried blood from his cheeks and forehead, all that remained from Ellie's quick attempt to clean it.

"Thanks," He said quietly, understanding that his behavior only makes things worse. It's not like he didn't want to see her or her concern left him careless, just everything felt alien to him. Like it was just an echo of something, maybe not even his own feelings while he stuck somewhere in the moment when he pulled the trigger. How is it called? Yeah, crucial moment.

"Don't mention it."

Despite Thea didn't think she would fall asleep, in the morning it turned out that she did, actually. In an uncomfortable position, so now everything numbed, but she doze off and woke up when sun's rays were already making their way through the curtains. She stood up carefully, not willing to awake him. Ortiz was lying on her bed in the same position with the same painfull look on his face. His dreams were a mess and more like nightmares where he had to go back to that moment over and over again, hearing the victorious laugh of Roosevelt and a faceless man who brought him to this point. Thea put her hand on his forehead and for a moment, the wrinkle between his eyebrows smoothed and breathing became less heavy. But when she left it all

hunted him down again. As she came out of her bedroom, Ellie was already preparing to go to the clubhouse. A simple look was more than enough to understand that this was not the best night for both of them.

"I can stay if you need me, T," she said, hugging her. Ellie wished she won't ever be in her place. Carrying all these feelings inside for so long and now have no opportunity to help somehow, to ease the pain of someone who you love that deeply - it's something that not everyone can bare. Ellie wasn't sure how would she act if it was someone who she cared about the same way Thea did about Juice. Probably she would lose her mind too, but she didn't want to figure that out.

"No-no, it's fine, El. Chibs will come soon, soâ€|" Lynn nodded and then hurried to leave, saying that she will come back immediately if she'll need her. Thea was left alone, waiting for Telford, sitting in the living room and smoking around the third cigarette, eyes fixed like a statue, absolutely motionless. A few times she checked up on Juice but he was still sleeping, or maybe pretending so. When Chibs finally showed up, Thea opened the door without looking at him.

"You're okay, lass?" Martinez extinguished the cigarette and sat on the couch, crossing her arms.

"Do I look so?" Chibs closed his eyes, nodding sadly. She pointed at her bedroom, saying that Juice's still there, probably sleeping, but she's not sure. "Chibs," she stopped him before he disappeared in the corridor. He turned back and came a little closer, but Thea continued to look directly in nowhere. "What happened? I'm a part of this bloody club, I have my right to knowâ€|"

"It's not my story to tell, T. Give him some time, the boy needs to recover," Thea smirked with bitterness, finally turning back and looking Telford directly in the eyes.

"I don't want to you to bring me his dead body next time, Chibs. Promise me, you won't," And with this words she left to the kitchen, waiting until Telford will pick Juice up and leave her alone.

Meanwhile, Jax waited for Gemma to take Abel and then he finally got to the club. He was about to talk to Clay about this Cartel-shit again, to tell him that he want the club out of it and that they need to have another vote. He noticed that Clay didn't come yet, so he decided to spend a little time with Ellie, who was standing behind the bar counter with a tired and worried expression on her face.

"Hey, El. Is everything alright?" He asked, approaching her. Ellie waited for a few seconds and then she just let all that words to slip from her lips.

"Last night I was stitching Juice on Thea's kitchen. We were sitting in the living room, talking about some pointless stuff I don't even remember now, and then they just knocked on our door. When I first saw him with all that blood and pain on his face, I thought I won't be able to do anything, just like Thea. All the time she was standing behind us, trying to take control over herself. And then I ended up

taking a bullet out of his leg and stitching up the wound, 'cause I knew I had to do that, for him, for her. But the thing that really scared me was not the gunshot wound, but my calmness in this situation. Wasn't I supposed to be shocked and terrified?" She sighed as she didn't need and answer to that. Jax watched as she continued to clean up everything around her despite that it wasn't necessary. It was her way to calm herself, just like Tara's was to treat him with all this shit, saying, that this isn't the right way to live. He could swear that he heard the words coming out of her mouth, could swear that he heard the sound of her voice with notes of anger and fear. And judgement. But Ellie was silent and obviously had no plans to hit him with morality lesson. She accepted all things that happened to her and, meeting such a reaction for the first time, Jax wasn't sure how he need to act about it.

"Sometimes people around us get hurt, and sometimesâ€œ| " He didn't end though it was clear what he was about to say. He put his hand on Ellie's, making her look at him. "Most of the people here don't like us for a reason, Ellie, and we can't blame them. And we won't blame you if you decide that this, I mean, all of this is something you are not ready to deal with. 'Cause what happened to Juice is not the worst thing that happens here," Teller said quietly. Ellie shook her head and put her other hand on his. Her voice was soft but yet very confident.

"It may be hard to believe, but this kind of life is something I got used to. Well, not exactly this kind, but..." She broke, looking somewhere down. "Just know that I'm here, if youâ€œ| if all of you will ever need my help," It seemed like they stayed like this for eternity, but the moment was broken by the sudden appearance of Clay. Jax excused and left Ellie, asking Clay for a minute. The impression was that Morrow already understood what conversation will be about.

"I want you to organize the council. This shit has already come to far, Clay, and it will go further."

"Do not forget that you were the one who vote 'yay' for fucking coke," hissed Morrow. The other members of SAMCRO showed up just about at time to see this little scene.

"I changed my mind. And I bet the others too. Organize the council, Clay. Now," And with this words Jax left him and walked directly to the room with the reaper. Morrow looked after him with undisguised displeasure. He didn't like how uncontrolled his step-son have become and how he started to resemble his father. He knew well what this kind of behavior will lead to, he remembered how he found once the only way to keep everything under his control. And he really didn't want a repeat, just as much as he didn't want to follow Jax's lead so easily. But seemed like he didn't have a choice and just hoped that no matter what Teller conceived, he won't succeed. Made a knock on a door to the chapel to capture attention, he rumbled:

"Get-together. Call the rest," And he entered the room after Jax, obviously overstepping himself. Sitting at the head table, he looked at him fixedly. "What you want to achieve, Jax?"

"I want to protect our club from that kind of shit that happened these days. Coke, manâ€œ|" He shook his head. "That's too much. I thought that maybe we can handle it, but everything says the

otherwise. Brother against brother, really?"

"If Miles was a rat he would shit on club's business no matter what it would be. Don't blame drugs for people's rot," Clay grinned wickedly. "Just admit that we fucked up with that boy and forgot."

"Forget for how long? Until another betrayal will hit us, or unless someone will die for nothing by mistake? I doubt that you want that blood on coke to be our blood."

"And what you wanna do, just walk out? It doesn't work like that, son," He leaned a bit forward. "Either you have a fucking magical plan, or you leave this idea."

"We'll see," Jax put out his cigarettes, decided that as well as the others started to gather, the conversation can be considered as completed. He didn't want to admit out loud that he understood that Clay was right. They couldn't just walk away from this partnership without any consequences, so they needed a plan that will please everybody, including the Cartel.

"What's the emergency, man?" Tig sat to the left of Clay, looking pretty confused, just as everybody else. When Happy, who was the last one, came in and closed the door, Morrow straightened his back.

"We should ask our VP," Seemed like he wanted to put Jax in an uncomfortable position, but Teller wasn't embarrassed at all. He just extinguished his cigarette, making a small meaningful pause.

"The emergency is that our deal with Romeo was a mistake. I know that it sounds inconsistently, 'cause I was one of those who voted up for it, but in the light of recent events..." He involuntary looked at the empty chair where Juice was usually sitting. "I thought it would be safer to accept Cartel's offer than to go against it, but I'm not so sure anymore. What it already brought to us and what may come in future is completely unpredictable, so the best way for the club is to step back till we're not too deep in this shit."

"You needed awhile to get to that, huh?" said Piney from the other side of the table.

"And how will we step back, Jackie-boy?" It went without saying, that Chibs will support him, but he really didn't see a clear way out.

"I'm not sure yet," Teller admitted. "But first goes the question if we're really gonna do this because no doubts that it's risky. No guarantees that we'll succeed, but in my opinion..." And he didn't have a chance to finish, 'cause his speech was interrupted by the sound of gunshots and breaking window panes that made everyone reflexively throw themselves on the floor. Whistle of bullets above their heads lasted about ten seconds more and then everything turned quiet. In the clouds of dust and gunsmoke sounded a couple of curses.

"Is everybody okay?" Shouted Jax, trying to raise up on his feet. He heard affirmative answers. When he finally stood up, he rushed to the shattered window to see who attacked them, but black truck already disappeared behind the corner. "Fuck."

If he needed some sign from someone above... Well, he got it.

## 8. It's all about hiding

This unexpected attack only convinced Jax more about the rightness of his desire to end this partnership with Cartel, which brought them only blood, suffering and death for the last time. Any money don't cost this shit, especially when it's about someone's life we're talking now. He didn't know if it was the pure luck that no one got hurt or whoever did that only wanted to warn them, it doesn't matter, 'cause the message was clear: everyone who involved with Galinda Cartel somehow will die sooner or later. Jax helped Bobby to stand up and then it was like a lightning strike that caught him by surprise.

"Ellie!" shouted Teller as he run out of the room. At first he didn't notice her behind the bar and thought that the worst had happened. He didn't safe her. He wasn't there for her and she died alone for nothing. That's what were his thoughts like, a big instant mess of anger and regret, but suddenly Ellie appeared out of nowhere and wrapped her arms around his neck. He pulled her closer, breathing out with relief, and tangled his fingers in her hair with little shards in it. "Thanks God you're okay. I was afraid youâ€!" he whispered without strength to end this sentence, pressing his forehead to hers.

"Didn't see that coming, did ya?" she whispered, smiling with tears that started forming in her eyes. "I was in the kitchen when I heard gunfire and run here immediately as the shots stopped. I wanted to check if you're okay, I thought you could be dead," she started to shiver in his arms and he just keep petting her head, whispering that everything's gonna be okay.

"I won't let that happen again, Ellie, I swear," she nodded, pulling closer to him, trying to find protection inside his arms. Clay walked out of the room and noticed this scene with some idea forming in his head at the very same moment. He knew that this damn attack will convince other to support Jax in his will to end with Cartel and that pissed him off seriously. Morrow stopped Tig and said him to call Romero.

"Set up a meeting, tell him it's fucking important. And make it fast 'cause cops will definitely visit us very soon," then he hurried to walk out of the clubhouse but Bobby caught him.

"I warned you that something like this will happen but you didn't listen! Don't think, that because of this we won't have the vote. This time we will make it right," Clay clenched his fists and hissed to Munson with threat in his voice:

"Do not forget who you're talking to, Elvis, or I'll cut off you're fucking tongue," he left him and went to Tig, who ended his short conversation with Cartel.

"In half an hour at the warehouse," Nodded Trager, hiding his cellphone. Clay gave Bobby one more angry look and went out, not wanting to see that his threats had no effect. Munson just shook his head.

"Stubborn fool," He mumbled to himself, ignoring Tig's suspicious glance. Turning to Jax, he uttered, "Are you coming, son?"

Teller gave Ellie a protectionist kiss on a forehead and hurried to join others on their way to clearing everything. Nobody actually had a doubts that this shit was connected with Cartel and their partnership so they were looking forward to get some answers and, as an additional bonus, someone specific they could punish for attack. When they got to the storage it turned out that not only Romeo with his people were awaiting for them but Alvarez too.

"Shitty morning, isn't it?" He said as they approached and shook Clay's hand first.

"We've had worse," Jax replied without a smile, looking at Romeo and Torres. "But still it wasn't a good surprise."

"Yeah, much worse surprise would be your people's dead bodies?" Alvarez clicked his tongue. "Well, I've got such one."

"We were just lucky, but it doesn't have matter, we didn't sign up for this shit anyway."

"This shit is a usual thing in this kind of business," Romero made a little step forward. "But I understand, you didn't want troubles and this one is, I'm afraid, our mistake. We're pretty sure that those who attacked you were from Lobos Sonora."

"Aye, cartels' showdown," Telford, who stood a bit aside, grunted with displeasure. "Isn't it something you should warn us about?"

"Didn't thought they'll dare to show up in Charming," Torres was irritated as usual. "But as well as they did, it's a chance to deal with them. How many people do you have?"

"Not enough," Clay shook his head. "I understand this competitive shit but not when it touches my town. We're in quite bad standing with the police so we don't need hype."

"And you won't have it," Promised Parada. His right hand spoke again:

"We need to find out who helped them here, they couldn't just show up from nowhere. We'll find it out - we'll lure them and solve the problem by joint forces."

The plan seemed to be reasonable and they didn't have the other one anyway. But reasonable didn't mean simple, because finding out who stood behind the aiming Lobos on Charming took awhile. This hitch turned into another gunfire right on the streets and the need to act decisively. The first step of this kind of actions was to protect the club which meant to protect everyone who was connected with it somehow too. Gathering members and their families at the clubhouse was a clear sign that everything is pretty bad and it made nervous those who understand it.

One of those understanding was Thea. When Kozik showed up at her doorstep, she immediately felt that something was wrong. They didn't

have a chance to speak plainly lately but the fact that he was the one who came to her spoke volumes. Juice asked exactly Kozik to talk to Thea as well as he thought that he would be able to convince his stubborn friend about the necessity of gathering. But he miscalculated a bit, Martinez was as adamant as always, demanding full explanations before doing anything.

"It's cause of gunfire, isn't it?" She crossed her arms.

"Yeah, yeah," Herman pursed his lips. He knew she won't give up without a fight but luckily he had an experience in convincing her. "T, it's temporary. We know who standing behind all of this so we'll handle that shit very quickly, I promise. C'mon, girl, just let me take you to the clubhouse. We don't wanna get you hurt," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder. Thea squinted her eyes and smirked bitterly.

"We? Juice sent you, huh? Unbelievable!" she rolled her eyes and threw Kozik's hand away, leaving him in the room. Despite how hard she wanted to screw both of them and the entire club together, at this moment she understood that spending a few nights under protection won't be so bad. So when she came out of her bedroom with a small package , where was mainly the work stuff, Kozik met her with satisfied smile. "I'm still mad at you, so don't grin here, jackass."

"Don't be such a drama queen Martinez," he laughed and went out after her. Kozik ride right after her car, but both of them noticed a black tinted car that followed them straight to the club. Saying that Thea was scared as hell would be a huge understatement, 'cause when she and Herman finally got to the TM, she literally run out of her car and stared at their pursuers. The car ride away as soon as two prospects closed the gates but she coudn't make a move until Kozik returned her in the reality.

"Thea, who was that?" he sounded worried. She looked at him after a few moments like she was thinking if it was needless to tell him, but then she just shooked her head, trying to smile, and said:

"Nothing important, Koz. Let's go," Martinez took him by the hand and they walked together to the club where everyone were already gathered. Clay stood in the middle of the room, preparing for his supportive speech. Thea nodded Ellie, who was standing by Jax's side and then found Juice, who was standing near Chibs and Bobby. She turned away and stay with Herman.

"Okay, everyone," started Clay loudly. "I know this shit is quite unpleasent for all of you, but we need to make sure that our family won't get hurt untill we take care of this problem. No one get out alone, women and kids stay here under the constant watch. We'll do our best so let's support each other here and show those bastards that we are not that easy to break," everyone cheered and clapped. This was hope everyone needed and so Clay gave it to them. After this speech Jax pulled Ellie away from the room for a moment and took something out of his pocket. Then he took her hand and placed a little cold gun in her hand.

"I want you to take it and carry with you no matter where you gonna go, okay? In a case if I won't be near," Ellie looked at the gun in her hand with mixed feelings. She swallowed hard and then nodded,

lifting her head. "You know how to use it?"

"Well, the principleâ€|" she said uncertainly.

"Let me show you," he helped her to take a gun right, then slowly showed how to remove it from the fuse. "It has no serial numbers and despite I hope you won't need to use it, you must be prepared for everything, okay? I don't wanna anything happen to you, Ellie," he hugged her tight and she leaned closer to him in respond. Meanwhile Unser, who was also at the clubhouse tonight, finally found Gemma.

"You've been looking for me, sweetheart?" he asked, approaching the table where she was sitting with Abel on her lap.

"Yeah, I wanted to talk to you but nowâ€|" She glanced at her grandson like saying that it was a wrong time but, for her luck, the boy just saw his father and Lynn who came back to the hall and shouted 'Ellie!' so she noticed him and came closer.

"Hey, what's up, cowboy?" She smiled widely.

"Could you look after him for awhile?" Using a moment asked Gemma. For the past time she quite got used to her presence and couldn't deny that Abel adored her so it was pretty convinient.

"Sure," Ellie's voice was giving away her emarrassement as well as she still was always awaiting for some kind of a trick. But seeing that there is no any subtext, she just took Teller jr. in her arms, giving Gemma a chance to look for some privacy to talk with Wayne. When they got to her office, she closed the door and, automatically, turned down the shutters.

"Is everything okay?" As always when it was about her, Unser was obviously concerned. "I mean, aside from this crazy shit with gunshots and stuff."

Gemma hesitated, sitting down on the coach. When she started to speak she wasn't looking at her friend, "I found something. Pretty long time ago, actually, but for some reason it started to bother me much only lately."

"And what is it?" He sat down next to her. "Something bad?"

"Maybe. I don't know, it's more likeâ€| neutral by itself? It's some letters and I guess they're nothing unless they get to the wrong hands," She shook her head nervously. "It's John's letters to his mistress."

"Uhm, Gemâ€|"

"No, no, that's not the point," She prevented unnecessary words of pity. "The point is that they're not just love letters but kinda confessions, you know. Everything he thought is written down, every fear and suspect."

"Honey, I'm afraid I'm not quite following," Unser frowned, really trying to understand what she was talking about. Of course he had some guess but full picture still didn't reveal to him.

"He knew, Wayne. John knew what awaits for him, he wrote about that to her."

"You meanâ€| He knew he's gonna die?" He was either confused, or shocked.

"I mean, he knew he's gonna be murdered. He saw that coming and he was right," After these words there was silence. Unser perfectly knew whose hand brought death to John Teller so it wasn't necessary to say it out loud. The only thing he couldn't understand is why Gemma's talking about it 'cause he thought that it didn't change much for her.

"You still have 'em? These letters?" She nodded. "Why?"

"I don't know. They might be dangerous, if only Jax will find themâ€| "

"Then get rid of them!"

"I wanted to!" Gemma stood up. "I've tried but something stopped me from doing it," She approached the table and opened the drawer. Taking out the letters, she shook her head. "I know what it can bring to Clay and to the club itself very well, Wayne, I justâ€|" She broke, running her fingers over the folder.

"Right," Was the only thing he replied. Sometimes lifeless things were carrying more life than alive one's and he understood it clearly.

And by the time Wayne and Gemma had a quite risky conversation, things were going right to another one that promised to end not so quietly. Juice caught Thea up at the corridor leading to the dorms and he didn't need to ask to understand that she's not excited about being captured here.

"I know you don't like stuff like that but it's for your own good, T," He tried to catch her by her arm but she stepped to the side. "C'mon, you know that your anger won't change anything. Stop being so stubborn!"

"So you can be obstinate and I can't?" She crossed her arms. "You're avoiding me since that bloody night and now asking me to be a good girl? Screw you, Ortiz."

"I won't let you go outta here anyway."

"Try to stop me," Cold metal was in her voice as she passed him by.

"Thea.."

"Leave her, man," It was Tig, who found this little scene and now chuckled. "She won't go anywhere, guess she's just trying to keep being warrior princess."

"Yeah," Said Juice when Traged tapped him on the shoulder.

"C'mon, I'll show you one lame hooker, you will definitely find common languageâ€|"

They went back to the bar and Tig spent the rest of the evening trying to distract Juice until he became the one who got distracted by some lovely ginger pussy. Soon as Tig left him to his own thoughts, Fil hurried to Clay with a report about sheriff's car waiting at the gates.

"Ladies, the escort is here! Be nice," smirked Clay and told prospect to open the gates and let him in. Roosevelt unhesitatingly walked to the clubhouse and came in, seeing everybody laughing, drinking and spending time too good for people whose club was under fire not so long ago. "Sheriff, what do we owe such a pleasure?" said Morrow, making a few sips from his beer. Eli took off his glasses and glanced over Ortiz, who he noticed immediately.

"Wanted to make sure if you didn't find out who might stand behind all of these attacks? Judging by your little family party, I could assume that some details you are certainly know," but Clay just threw up his hands and continued to drink his beer.

"Who knows. Could've been angry pirates, man," roared Happy with his usual face. Everyone laughed, and Roosevelt smirked as well, knowing perfectly that no one here will share a thing with him. Except one person, of course, who just don't have another choice.

"Ortiz! We need to make a pee-test, so you ride at the police station," he said, putting his glasses on. Juice swallowed hard, feeling how everyone turned on him immediately after those words.

"When?"

"Now," answered Roosevelt, shrugging his shoulders. Juice mumbled, that this is must be some kind of bullshit, but Clay ordered him to go and then ride to the warehouse and meet Tacoma there. Despite all of this shit with Lobos Sanora, the coke and guns still need to be protected. Juice nodded and went out after Roosevelt, feeling how his steps became heavier with every move. This meeting didn't take long, 'cause Potter was clearly not going to make any deal with Juice without a sample of mexican coke and Juice didn't want to give that sample without some assurances. A damn vicious circle. But yet Eli had a trump card and with its help he could almost force Juice to make everything he want. "I'll meet you at our usual place. Bring me the sample and I'll set up the meeting with my friend," understanding that he has no way out, Ortiz nodded and walked out of police station with shaking hands and mess in his head.

Back at clubhouse Thea tried to concentrate for about the thousandth time by this moment, but it was quite hard to do, considering that this place was full of people who wanted to laugh and kick up a row instead of being silent at least for a moment.

>"For fuck's sake," she whispered, angrily throwing away her papers and then literally run out of Juice's dorm. Without hesitation she came over to the bar and asked a prospect named Rat to make her a drink. After a few glasses she and Captain Morgan became best friends for this evening, but she wasn't about to stop at that point.<p>

"So you're good now? I mean, this lockdown could be quite terrifying in spite that everyone trying to look carefree," asked Jax, wrapping his hand around Ellie's neck. She could sense his hot breath on her

cheeks and unwillingly she blushed immediately. This closeness literally drove her crazy, trying to throw away every reasonable thought. He put his hand on her waist and pulled her even closer, putting another hand on her cheek. "It's gettin' louder here, babe," but right before he could kissed her Ellie sharply got rid of his grip and apologised nervously, saying some pointless drivel and trying to find a way to escape this situation. She looked like she was scared to shit and Jax was, lets just say, a little confused. Who knows what could have happened in the next moment but Thea saved the day and took Ellie in the middle of the room right to the pool table.

"Hey, Koz, come here, sweetie, we wanna play with you," she grabbed Ellie by the hand and whispered her drunkenly, "It's gonna be strip-pool, shh," but Ellie seemed to be still somewhere else but here, trying to realise what just happened.

"She must be gay. Or a nun. Or a virgin. Or all at the same time," giggled Tig, who decided to make a small break in his road trip to pussy-land and now was ending his second or third or whatever tequila shot. Today he was meant to notice every dramatic scene around here. "Such a mix, such a beauty", he mumbled, filling another glass. Jax replied nothing, watching Ellie smiling obviously nervous to Thea, who seemed to be not very bothered by it. He didn't need a long time to understand that drunk Martinez is something not everyone should see when she started to take off her blouse to the accompaniment of encouraging cheers. He decided that it'd be better to take her away before she did something she'll regret about in the morning. Along with it, it was an opportunity to avoid thinking about Ellie's actions which was obviously unnecessary.

"Hey, hey, wildcat," he called, approaching the pool table. "Don't you've had enough?"

"Not at all, Jackie-boy," Thea frowned with arms a-kimbo.

"C'mon," ignoring her protest, he took her by the hand and slung his own over her shoulder. "You'll thank me tomorrow."

"Ellie, tell him!" she tried to find some support in the face of her friend, but it revealed that Lynn was no longer within eyeshot. Not being able to question this absence, Martinez just sighed loud enough to let Jax understand how displeased she is but he didn't care much and in couple of seconds they were already on the way back to Juice's dorm.

"Ruiner," Thea dropped when they got to the room. In private it seemed like she wasn't so drunk as she was in the saloon and it made Teller think that it was some deliberate game she played.

"What's wrong, T?" he asked bluntly.

"What are you talking about?"

"Your little spectacle. Come on."

"Gosh, can I get drunk at least?" she folded her arms. "Or I'm really a fucking prisoner?"

"Jesus, what got into you, Martinez? What prisoner? You know

perfectly that you're here for your own safety," Jax began to lose his temper. "And considering what you've told me I thought you won't mind being a bit protected."

"I don't!" her answer was quickly, like she didn't even think about it.

"Then the hell is your problem?"

"How do you think?" looking at him a bit wildly, in the next moment she seemed to loose all her ardor. She turned away, coming to the bed and sitting on its corner. "What happened to him, Jax?"

"Thea, it'sâ€|"

"Don't say it's not your story to tell," she interrupted not letting him to finish. "It's aboud goddamn club, it is your story."

Jax was about to argue with something but in the last moment he changed his mind and just sighed, "He caught a bullet when he found a rat."

"Rat? What?.."

"It's not the point. We've had some problems with our business."

"Is that all?" she couldn't believe that everything was that simple. There must've been something that made Juice to move away.

"No," Jax knew she's not gonna like what he's gonna say. He didn't like it either just as much as he didn't like everything about partnership with the Cartel and its consequences. "He killed him." He awaited for some loud reaction. Curses or recalls to God, attempts to ask again in case something could change but she was silent. He thought that she might suspected it by herself and now this truth wasn't so unbelievable.

"Are your problems solved now?" she said unexpectedly and he didn't quite follow it instantly.

"What?"

"Your business problems. They are solved after all?" Thea finally looked at him.

"Kind of," he couldn't say that this business is one whole problem. "We've just gone new one."

"Yeah, I guess I see that," she smirked bitterly. "Anyway, thank you for telling. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to be on my own a bit."

"You're fine?"

"Aha. Don't worry," she was about to turn away again but then she remembered, "You better go find Ellie, she disappeared somewhere. And don't be insistent, not with her, believe me."

"I'm being a good boy," he chuckled. "Call me if you need anything."

She nodded and after the sound of the closing door almost fell down on the bed. She heard that sometimes people who requiers truth don't really want to hear it but only now she felt it on her skin. And while she was thinking about known night and the fact that she was washing away some Son's blood from Juice's face, Ortiz was giving a sample of coke to Roosevelt, nervously turning around each and every second as if he expected that in the next moment somebody will walk out of the shadow unexpectedly and catch him red-handed. He watched as sheriff checked the sample by tasting it and then hide it deep in his pocket. Just to be honest, Roosevelt hated what he was about to do. He hated being involved in this shit, he hated to play somebody's life like it was nothing. He wasn't like that, he always lived trying to be a good man and fair guardian of order, but at the some point Potter started to play with his life just like he was playing with Juice's and he couldn't do anything about it.

"Put your hands against the car," Eli said quietly, taking handcuffs from his pocket. Juice couldn't believe his ears. This must be all just a big stupid joke and the whole world couldn't imagine how funny it isn't.

"The hell are you doing?" said Ortiz, refusing to believe in what's going on here. Sheriff shook his head and grab him by his shoulders, making him turn around by force.

"You're under arrest for the possession of cocaine," said Eli unemotional. The game was well played and Juice performed his part splendidly without knowing that. He understood that at this point he can't walk away and moreover he can't refuse to help them and now even if he decide to go against them, call his lawyer and explain that he was threatened and manipulated no judge and no juries won't ever believe him 'cause he's a criminal and a killer, who was caught for possession. Sitting in the cell, he thought about how long will it take to club to realise that he is the one who's real rat. A rat and a murderer.

Eli came back soon with sort of a guilty look on his face. His conversation with Potter ended with ultimate disgust and hatred. The son of a dick didn't even denied the fact that he enjoyed this shit. And Roosevelt hated that guys like Potter were define themselfs as a men of law and justice.

"Iâ€œI don't know what they want from you," he started without looking at Juice. His voice was free of the usual mockery, this time he was almost sorry for Juice and for what he personally did to him. "But at this point you have no choice. You have to cooperate, Juan Carlos," he finally turned to Juice and find him smiling sadly, almost hopelessly.

"It doesn't matter anymore," was all he said before leaving. Eli breathed out heavily as if he knew that it will end badly.

Back at the club Jax finally found Ellie. She was sitting on the swings alone outside, being completely captured by her thoughts. She tried to understand herself, tried to figured out how to conquer those demons, that stuck mostly in her head. When the moment came she realised that no matter how hard she tried to convince herself that she got through it, left it behind and learned how to live with it, she didn't. She stuck in her past, in her moment of no return and the

butterfly continued to wave its wings on the other side of planet, causing a storm now and here.

"Here you are, El," said Jax, sitting next to her, smiling as usual. He tried to act as normal as possible, like nothing happened, but it was clear that both of them gonna remember that minute every time they'll simply look at each other. Ellie turned her head and smiled back.

"It was too stuffy there, needed some air," Jax nodded, swaying on the swings a bit. The silence that fall after her words started to put pressure on the shoulders. Jax remembered, what Thea told him, and he understood himself that whatever happening in Ellie's head it's her own business. But yet he wanted to make it clear so both of them could decide who they gonna be to each other.

"Just so we're clear, it's okay, you know, I mean, what happened there. I get that, you have your right. I just don't want you to think that I'm some kind of dick who needs only one thing in his life," he got up and walked to her, pressing a light kiss on her forehead. Before he left, Ellie took his hand and looked in his eyes, what actually cost her a lot of strength.

"It's not because of you, Jax. I'd never thought about you that way, believe me, it's justâ€!" she tried to pick some words, but none of them were not enough. An the truth was too painfull to share, too terrible. "I mean, I like you, okay? I really do. I justâ€! I need some time. And if you're give it to me, that would mean a lot to me," saying that this sudden confidence only made everything more complicated would be a huge understatement. When she left, going back to the clubhouse, Jax took a cigarette from his pocket and tried to calm his thoughts with it.

"May I?" asked Ellie, opening door to Juice's room, where Thea was still lying on the bed with eyes closed. She nodded and moved, so Lynn could lie down next to her. "Are you okay?" Martinez took a deep breath.

"Noâ€! No, I'm not. And I don't know how to deal with this," she whispered, clinging to Ellie, searching for support.

"So am I, T," Lynn replied quietly. For couple of minutes they both were laying in absolute silence until Thea looked at her friend with a bit of uncertainty.

"Don't you wanna tell?" she asked, not really expecting Ellie to agree but feeling like she had to ask. But surprisingly, she didn't avoid the answer though before saying anything she made a hard pause that revealed how difficult saying what she was about to say was for her.

"Remember I told you that my father lost me in cards?" she wasn't looking at Thea. Her sight was directed somewhere up, at the ceiling, but Martinez doubted that she saw abything in front of her but some visions of memory. But when she nodded, Lynn definitely noticed that and continued, sounding unusually unamotional. "I said that the man who he lost me to wasn't quite nice but it wasâ€! It was an understatement, actually. But I guess it was obvious from that bruises, wasn't it?" she smirked bitterly.

"What did he do?" Thea's question was quiet as if she wasn't sure whether she wanted to know the answer. She had some guesses even before and they were one of the reasons why she never actually asked Ellie about that time. But suspect something and know it for sure is very different things; maybe it was enough of awfull truth for one day?

"He raped me," finally uttered El. Her voice was empty and lifeless, eyes still fixed on something Thea couldn't see. But being close to her, she could feel how she trembled. "I was his pretty toy for about a month, I guess. I don't even know for sure, can you believe? It was just an endless nightmare where I couldn't count down the days or even care about it much. At some point I've probably even stopped looking forward to the end of it 'cause it seemed like there won't be one. Fortunately, it appeared that he got bored of me pretty soonâ€|" she shook her head. Weird smile stratched her lips when she turned to Martinez. "This fucking time is hunting me, T. I'm trying to ignore it, to act like it never happened like if it can erase everything but it catches me up over and over. And I'm scared as hell. Not my brain but something inside of me is almost screaming because of horror even if I know that I'm safe. Like with Jax. And I don't want to be, I'm tired of fear, T. I'm exhausted," she broke, closing her eyes and shaking more noticeable.

"Hey," Martinez lightly touched her forearm. "Everything is going to be okay. I know how it sounds, really, but that's true, I promise."

Ellie chuckled, turning away. She had to admit that this comforting hackneyed phrase had sense in some way because she understood that this all is just about time. But understanding didn't make anything easier. "Yeah," she almost breathed out.

One day it will. One day all of them will feel better. One day soon.

End  
file.